

A CATHOLIC JOURNEY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Behold the Lamb

An Inductive Bible Study in Fourteen Sessions

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

John 1:29 (RSV2CE)

Leader Guides, Discussion Guides, and Reference Cards

For small groups and adult faith formation · Win, Build, Send inductive format · 90 minutes per session

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Participant Take-Home Sheets 1-14 are provided as a separate merged document, one two-page sheet per session, to be printed and distributed only after each session concludes.

Using This Guide

The Study at a Glance

Behold the Lamb walks a small group through the entire Gospel of John in fourteen sessions of about 90 minutes each, in the Win, Build, Send inductive format, suited to small groups of every kind, from young adult ministry to parish-wide adult faith formation. Every session has three parts: a Leader Preparation Guide (read it during the week, never in the room), a Discussion Guide (your script for the evening), and a Leader Reference Card (every passage used, in order, so you can flag your Bible in advance). All Scripture is RSV2CE; keep the translation uniform in the room so that live discoveries land on the same wording.

The ANSWER Boxes

Every numbered Build question is followed by a shaded parchment ANSWER box labeled share after the discussion. The label is the method: ask the question, let the group dig, endure the silence, and only then consolidate with the box. The box is a net under the trapeze, not a substitute for the leap. If you read the boxes first, the study becomes a lecture and the discoveries die.

Live Discoveries

Several times each session, the group is sent to find an Old Testament passage with their own hands: Genesis 1 beside John 1, the bronze serpent, Jacob's ladder, Ezekiel's shepherds, the hyssop of Exodus 12. These lookups are the engine of the study. Never summarize a live discovery to save time; the pre-chosen cuts in each session's Time Note protect them for you. What a participant finds with their own hands, they keep.

The Steelman Chains

Each session builds one opposing position at full strength before answering it: the Arian reading of John 1:1, the symbolic reading of John 6, sola scriptura at John 5:39, and so on. Build the steelman honestly and let it stand a moment; a caricature refuted convinces no one, and your group will meet the real arguments soon enough. The press that follows always works from the text the group has just read. Trust the sequence: the strongest Catholic apologetics in this study is simply careful reading, and the group does most of it themselves.

The Board: Threads and Tallies

Keep a running board, a whiteboard corner or a shared page, across all fourteen weeks. It carries the sign tally (John numbers the first two signs, then hands the group the pen), the I AM line, and the long threads: the Hour, light and darkness, the dwelling of God, the bridegroom, the Lamb. Each session's Thread Watch, in the Leader Preparation Guide only, tells you exactly what to plant, advance, or resolve, and what to keep sealed. The board is the study's memory, and the payoffs of Sessions 13 and 14 depend on it.

The Sealed Guess

Take-Home 1 carries a write-in box: Why do you think Jesus is called the Lamb of God? Participants seal their guess in week one and bring it, unopened, to Session 13, where the guesses are opened in a

ceremony as the whole Gospel's answer converges. Two rules protect the mechanic. First, leaders must guard the seal absolutely: several Leader Preparation Guides contain material marked leader only or under seal, and it must never surface early, in the room or in conversation. Second, remind the group to keep and bring their sheets; Take-Home 12 carries the final boxed reminder, and Session 13 provides for anyone who forgets.

The Take-Home Sheets

Each session has a two-page participant Take-Home distributed only after the session ends, never before. Each contains a What We Found recap, that session's three Voices of the Church, the full Live It This Week practices, the memory verse, the next week's reading, and the Catechism references. The Take-Homes never contain ANSWER content, advance passage references, Thread Watch material, or steelman arguments; the discoveries belong to the room.

Time and Tone

Every session is built to 90 minutes, with a Time Note listing pre-chosen cuts in priority order so that pressure never falls on the discoveries, the steelman, or the prayer. Open and close with the prayers as written or in your own words; keep the tone of a warm mentor rather than a lecturer; and let silence do its work after the hard questions. Where the Church has defined, this study speaks plainly; where she has not, the guides say so honestly, and that honesty is part of the catechesis. Fourteen weeks from the first page, your group will hear the familiar words the priest speaks as he raises the Host before Communion, Behold the Lamb of God, and they will hear the whole Gospel of John inside them. That is the destination. Lead them there.

BEHOLD THE LAMB: SESSION 1

The Word Made Flesh

John 1:1-18 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover for themselves that John opens his Gospel by deliberately echoing Genesis 1, so that the man they will follow for fourteen sessions is introduced first as the eternal Word who created all things, who became flesh and pitched his tent among us.

Catholic Touchstone: The Incarnation. The Church confesses that the eternal Son, true God from true God, assumed a true human nature without ceasing to be God (CCC 456-463). Everything distinctively Catholic in this study, the sacraments, the Mass, the Church herself, flows from the conviction that God has truly entered the material world.

What You Need to Know

The Gospel of John is the last of the four Gospels, written, by most ancient and modern estimates, in the last decade of the first century. Ancient tradition is remarkably consistent about its author. St. Irenaeus of Lyons, writing around 180 AD, tells us that John, the disciple of the Lord, published the Gospel while living at Ephesus, and Irenaeus had this on close authority: as a boy he had heard St. Polycarp, who knew John personally. Many modern scholars debate how directly the Apostle held the pen, proposing a Johannine community or a disciple writing under his authority. The Church has not defined the question, and you should be honest about that with your group if it comes up. What the text itself claims is that it rests on the testimony of the beloved disciple, an eyewitness (John 19:35; 21:24), and that claim is what carries the weight in this study.

John does not begin in Bethlehem or at the Jordan. He begins before time. The first eighteen verses, often called the Prologue, are the overture of the whole Gospel: every major theme of the next twenty one chapters is announced here in miniature. Life, light, darkness, witness, glory, truth, rejection, divine sonship. If your group learns to hear these opening notes, they will recognize the melodies when they return.

The key term is *Logos*, translated Word. To a Greek ear it evoked the rational principle ordering the cosmos. To a Jewish ear it evoked something richer: the word by which God created in Genesis 1 (God said, and it was so), the prophetic word that comes to Israel, and Lady Wisdom of Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24, who was with God at creation and came to dwell in Israel. John gathers all of this and then says what no philosopher and no sage ever dared: the Word became flesh. The Greek is blunt, *sarx*, flesh, not merely a body or an appearance. And the verb John chooses for dwelt among us is *eskēnōsen*, literally he pitched his tent, he tabernacled. Any Jewish reader would hear the wilderness tabernacle of Exodus, the tent where the glory of God dwelt in the midst of the camp. John says the glory has a new tent now: the Word has made our full humanity his own dwelling. That is why he can add, we have beheld his glory.

Verse 14 calls the Word full of grace and truth, and verses 16 and 17 unfold the fullness. This is not a loose pairing. It echoes the Hebrew covenant formula *hesed we'emet*, steadfast love and faithfulness, the

very words God proclaimed to Moses on Sinai when He passed by in glory (Exodus 34:6). Charis is not a simple lexical equivalent of *hesed*, so this is allusion rather than translation, but the covenant pair is unmistakable and John's readers were meant to hear it. And verse 18, no one has ever seen God, answers Exodus 33, where even Moses was denied the sight of the divine face. John's claim is that what Moses asked for and could not receive, we have received: the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made Him known.

One pastoral note. This session makes the highest possible claim about Jesus, and some participants will have encountered readings that soften it, especially the rendering of John 1:1 as the Word was a god. Do not dodge this. The steelman chain in Part 2 presents that reading at full strength and then lets the text itself answer. Trust the process; the strongest Catholic apologetic here is simply a careful reading of John.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Genesis 1:1-5.** In the beginning, God, light, darkness, and creation by speech. John's first words are a deliberate echo. The group will discover this themselves in Build question 2; do not reveal it in advance.
- **Proverbs 8:22-31 and Sirach 24:8-12.** Wisdom present with God at creation, delighting before Him, then commanded to make her dwelling in Jacob. Sirach even uses tent language: in the holy tabernacle I ministered before him. John presents the Word as the reality toward which the Wisdom poetry was reaching.
- **Exodus 25:8-9 and 40:34-35.** The tabernacle, built so that God may dwell in the midst of His people, filled with the glory cloud. The backdrop for *eskēnōsen* in John 1:14.
- **Exodus 33:18-23 and 34:6.** Moses asks to see the glory and is told, you cannot see my face. God passes by proclaiming Himself abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. John 1:14-18 answers both verses at once: grace and truth have appeared, and the Son has made the unseen Father known.
- **Isaiah 44:24.** The LORD stretched out the heavens alone. Held in reserve for the steelman chain: if all things were made through the Word, and God created alone, the conclusion presses itself.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Doctor of the Church, City of God 10.29

Augustine recounts that a Platonist philosopher of his day used to say that the opening of John's Gospel deserved to be written in letters of gold and displayed in the most prominent place in every church. The pagans could recognize the grandeur of the Word who was with God. What they could not accept, Augustine observes, was the scandal that follows: the Word became flesh. The Prologue is where philosophy runs out of road and only faith can keep walking.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), Doctor of the Church, Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homily 2

Chrysostom marvels that these thunderclap opening lines come not from a philosopher trained in Athens but from a Galilean fisherman. He tells his congregation that John speaks from heaven itself,

uttering a voice louder and clearer than thunder, and that everything the Greek sages groped after, this unlettered man declares with authority. For Chrysostom this is itself evidence: no man invented the Prologue; it was given.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296-373), Doctor of the Church, On the Incarnation 54

Athanasius compresses the whole purpose of John 1:14 into one sentence, quoted by the Catechism itself in CCC 460: the Son of God became man so that we might become god, that is, sharers in the divine nature by grace. The Word did not assume our flesh as a costume but as a rescue. He took what is ours to give us what is His. Every sacrament your group will ever receive is this exchange continuing in time.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 456-460.** Why did the Word become flesh: to save us, that we might know God's love, to be our model of holiness, and to make us partakers of the divine nature.
- **CCC 461-463.** The Incarnation as the distinctive sign of Christian faith: belief that the Son of God truly assumed our humanity.
- **CCC 241-242.** The Church's confession, drawing directly on John 1:1, that the Son is the Father's eternal Word, consubstantial with Him.
- **CCC 291.** The New Testament reveals that God created everything through the eternal Word, citing John 1:3.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

The Lamb (title thread). Planted this week only as a question on Take-Home 1: participants write a sealed guess about why Jesus will be called the Lamb of God. They hear the title itself next session (1:29). Do not explain it. The full resolution comes in Session 13, when John's Passion account quietly lines up Passover lamb details around the cross.

Light and darkness. Planted in 1:4-5. Develops in 3:19-21 and chapters 8-9, and lands with terrible economy at 13:30, and it was night. Just note the vocabulary this week.

Beholding glory. We have beheld his glory (1:14). Develops at Cana (2:11, he manifested his glory) and inverts at the cross, which John presents as the hour of glorification. Do not resolve; only plant.

Tabernacle and temple. *Eskēnōsen* (1:14) begins a thread that runs to the temple of his body (2:21) and to the blood and water from the pierced side (19:34).

Session Goals

1. Participants discover the Genesis 1 echo on their own and can articulate why John begins before creation.

2. Participants can state from the text itself that the Word is eternal, distinct from the Father, truly God, and the Creator of all things.
3. Participants encounter the tabernacle background of dwelt among us and connect the Incarnation to God's desire to dwell with His people.
4. Participants hear the strongest version of the Arian reading of John 1:1 and watch the text answer it.
5. Participants write their sealed guess on the Lamb of God question and commit to the week's practices.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 20 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: the Dig Deeper box on Wisdom literature, Build question 5 on John the Baptist (recover it next session, which centers on him), and the second Send question. Do not cut the steelman chain or the sealed guess; both carry weight for the rest of the study.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Father, before anything existed, your Word already was. Tonight we open the Gospel of John asking for one grace: that we would not merely read about your Son but behold his glory. Open the Scriptures to us, and open us to the Scriptures. We ask this through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. When you hear the word God, what image or feeling comes to mind first? Where do you think that picture came from?
2. Think of the best opening line of a book or film you know. What makes a great opening work?

Transition: Tonight we read what might be the most audacious opening in all of literature. John had three other Gospels in circulation before him. He chose to begin somewhere none of them dared.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 1:1-5 aloud, slowly. Then ask:

Question 1. Without interpreting anything yet, what words does John repeat in these five verses? Just list them.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Word (three times in verse 1 alone), God, life, light, darkness, beginning, made. John writes with a tiny vocabulary on purpose. Each repeated word is a thread he will pull for twenty one chapters. If the group lists the words, they have already done the first act of inductive reading: noticing before interpreting.

Question 2 (live discovery). In the beginning. Somewhere else in your Bible, a book opens with those exact words. Find it, turn there, and read the first five verses of that book side by side with John's first five. What do the two passages share?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Genesis 1:1-5. Let the group find it; most will know, but the act of physically setting the pages side by side is the point. Shared elements: in the beginning, God, light, darkness, and creation happening through speech. God said, let there be light. John has noticed that in Genesis, God creates by speaking, and he gives that speech a name: the Word. John is rewriting Genesis 1 with the curtain pulled back. Before anything was made, the Word already was.

Press gently: notice the verbs. Created things were made; the Word simply was. John never says the Word came to be. The Word has no beginning.

Question 3. Stay in verse 1. John makes two statements about the Word that sit in tension: the Word was with God, and the Word was God. What does each half claim? Why might John need both?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The Word was with God: the Word is distinct from the Father, a someone in relationship, face to face with God. The Word was God: the Word is not a second, lesser deity but shares the one divine nature fully. Hold both and you are standing at the doorway of the doctrine of the Trinity. Drop either half and you fall into an old error: drop the first and Father and Son collapse into one person; drop the second and the Son becomes a creature. The Church spent her first centuries defending exactly this verse, and the group is about to see why.

Steelman: The Word Was a God?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

Tell the group: some sincere readers, most prominently the Jehovah's Witnesses in their New World Translation, render the last clause of verse 1 as the Word was a god. And they have a real grammatical observation behind them, so let us give it its full weight. In the Greek, the first mention of God in verse 1 has the definite article, the God, while the second does not, just god. So, the argument runs, John himself signals a difference: the Word is divine in some sense, a mighty one, the first and greatest creature, through whom God made everything else, but not the eternal God Himself. This reading claims to protect monotheism and to take the Greek seriously. Ask the group: if that were true, what would change about everything else we believe? Let them feel the stakes before you answer.

Question 4 (press from the text, live discovery). Now read verse 3 aloud. According to John, how much of created reality was made through the Word? Then send half the group to Isaiah 44:24 and have them read it to everyone. What does God say about who was with Him at creation?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Verse 3 is total: all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. John closes every loophole. If even one created thing exists that the Word did not make, verse 3 is false. So the Word cannot be a creature, because then the Word would have had to make himself. Isaiah 44:24 tightens the vise: I am the LORD, who made all things, who stretched out the heavens alone. If God created alone, and all things were made through the Word, then the Word is not beside God as a helper creature. He is within the identity of the one God.

On the grammar: Greek often drops the article here, a weighty though not mechanical signal on a predicate noun placed before the verb, and the force is qualitative. A fair rendering of the nuance is: what God was, the Word was. The same Gospel removes all doubt in its final chapters, when Thomas falls before the risen Jesus and says, my Lord and my God (20:28), and Jesus blesses rather than corrects him. John opens and closes on the same confession. That is deliberate architecture, and the group will see the far end of it in Session 14.

Question 5. Read verses 6-8. John has been soaring among eternal things, and suddenly: there was a man sent from God, whose name was John. Why interrupt a cosmic hymn to introduce a man? What one word describes his role, and why does the author immediately clarify what the Baptist is not?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Testimony saturates the two verses: he came for testimony, to bear witness, and again to bear witness. The Baptist's entire identity is testimony: he came to point. The clarification, he was not the light, may suggest that some in the first century still gave the Baptist undue prominence. Watch this become a pattern in John: every great figure and every great gift exists to point beyond itself to Christ. Next session is entirely about this man, so plant the interest and move on.

Question 6. Read verses 9-13. The true light comes into the world he himself made, and verse 11 says he came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to those who did receive him, what does verse 12 say he gave? And how does verse 13 say that happens?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Power to become children of God, and verse 13 insists this birth is not natural descent, not blood or the will of the flesh or the will of man, but birth of God. Being a child of God, for John, is not automatic to being human; it is a gift received through believing in his name. File this away: in two sessions Jesus will tell Nicodemus what this birth of God concretely involves, being born of water and the Spirit. Do not jump ahead; just make sure the group registers the phrase born of God, because John is planting it here on purpose.

Question 7 (live discovery). Read verse 14 aloud twice. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Greek verb behind dwelt literally means pitched his tent. Now send the group to Exodus 40:34-35. What was the tent, and what filled it when it was finished?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The tabernacle, the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled it, so thick that even Moses could not enter. Now reread John: the Word tabernacled among us, and we have beheld his glory. John is claiming that everything the wilderness tent was, the localized dwelling of God in the middle of His people's camp, Jesus now is, in flesh. The glory did not rest on a building this time. The eternal Word himself took a true human nature as his own, body and soul, without ceasing to be God, so that the glory now shines out from a human face. This is the verse the whole Catholic sacramental imagination grows from: God saves us not by lifting us out of the material world but by entering it. And it is why Catholics genuflect toward the tabernacle where the Blessed Sacrament dwells, the tent-word made permanent to this day; the name is not an accident.

Question 8 (live discovery). Read verses 16-18. Verse 14 called the Word full of grace and truth; here John says we have all received from his fullness, grace upon grace, and then contrasts the law given through Moses with the grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ. Send the group to Exodus 33:18-23 and 34:6. What did Moses ask for, what was he told, and what two qualities does God proclaim about Himself as He passes by?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Moses asked to see God's glory and was told, you cannot see my face. As God passes by, He proclaims Himself abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, in Hebrew *hesed we'emet*, which is the covenant pair John echoes as grace and truth. So verses 17 and 18 are not anti-Moses; they are the answer to Moses' prayer. What Moses begged for on the mountain and could not receive, the sight of God, has now been given: no one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the

Father, he has made him known. The law was a true gift through Moses. The Giver Himself has now come in person.

DIG DEEPER

Wisdom's tent. If the group has energy, read Sirach 24:8-12 aloud, where Wisdom, present with God from eternity, is commanded: make your dwelling in Jacob. Sirach even says, in the holy tabernacle I ministered before him. Israel's sages personified God's Wisdom and imagined her pitching a tent among the people. John announces that this poetry was prophecy, and the tent is real. This is also a quiet gift of the Catholic canon: Sirach is one of the deuterocanonical books, and the Prologue leans on it.

Synthesis question. One sentence each, no theological vocabulary allowed: according to John 1:1-18, who is Jesus?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Let every person answer; do not rush this. You are listening for the two poles the Prologue holds together: truly God, the eternal Word who made everything, and truly here, flesh, in a tent of skin and bone, visible glory. If someone says something like, the One who made me came to live with me, the session has landed.

Send

1. The Baptist's whole job description was witness. If a friend asked you this week why you are doing a Bible study, what would you actually say?
2. The Word entered the ordinary, flesh, a tent, a camp. Where in your ordinary week do you most need to remember that God is willing to dwell?

Live It This Week

- **Pray the Prologue.** Take John 1:1-18 at three verses a day, slowly, aloud if you can. Do not study it; sit in it. By Friday you will have prayed the whole overture.
- **Bow like you mean it.** This Sunday at the Creed, when the congregation bows at the words and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man, make the bow deliberately, remembering: he pitched his tent among us.
- **One act of witness.** Do one small Baptist-sized thing this week: mention the study to one person, or tell someone one thing you noticed tonight.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus Christ, eternal Word of the Father, you did not despise our flesh but made it your tent. Pitch your tent again this week in our homes, our work, our friendships. Give us the Baptist's joy of pointing to you. And as we begin this journey, teach us, step by step, why you are called the Lamb. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 1, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 1:1-5** · opening reading, repeated words, the Word with God and the Word as God
- **Genesis 1:1-5** · live discovery, the deliberate echo: beginning, God, light, darkness, creation by speech
- **John 1:3** · all things made through him, first press of the steelman chain
- **Isaiah 44:24** · live discovery, the LORD stretched out the heavens alone
- **John 20:28** · leader reference only, Thomas' confession as the Gospel's closing bracket; do not read in session, it resolves in Session 14
- **John 1:6-8** · the man sent from God, witness
- **John 1:9-13** · the true light, his own received him not, children of God born of God
- **John 1:14** · the Word became flesh, tabernacled, beheld his glory; memory verse
- **Exodus 40:34-35** · live discovery, the glory fills the tabernacle
- **John 1:16-18** · grace and truth, Moses contrast, the only Son makes the Father known
- **Exodus 33:18-23** · live discovery, Moses denied the sight of the face
- **Exodus 34:6** · live discovery, steadfast love and faithfulness, hesed we'emet
- **Sirach 24:8-12** · Dig Deeper, Wisdom commanded to dwell in Jacob, and ministering in the holy tabernacle (24:10)
- **Proverbs 8:22-31** · leader background only, Wisdom at creation
- **Exodus 25:8-9** · leader background only, that I may dwell in their midst
- **CCC 241-242, 291, 456-463** · Catechism connections

BEHOLD THE LAMB: SESSION 2

Come and See

John 1:19-51 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that the second half of John 1 is a cascade of witness and invitation: the Baptist points, disciples follow, each finder immediately fetches someone else, and Jesus caps the chapter by claiming to be Jacob's ladder, the meeting place of heaven and earth. They also hear, for the first time, the cry that names our whole study, and they are asked to let it remain a mystery a while longer.

Catholic Touchstone: Vocation and witness. Faith in this chapter travels person to person, by name: Andrew finds Simon, Philip finds Nathanael. The Church grows the same way today, and every baptized person shares the Baptist's job description. Nobody in John 1 is argued into discipleship; they are invited to come and see.

What You Need to Know

The Prologue was the overture; now the curtain rises, and John structures the opening act as a week of days (note the repeated the next day in 1:29, 35, 43, and on the third day in 2:1). Many commentators see here a quiet new-creation week answering Genesis 1, the echo your group discovered last session. You do not need to press the scheme; just know it is there.

The delegation from Jerusalem asks the Baptist three loaded questions: Are you the Christ? Are you Elijah? Are you the prophet? Each had a pedigree. Malachi 4:5 promised Elijah's return before the day of the LORD, and Deuteronomy 18:15-18 promised a prophet like Moses. The Baptist answers with descending brevity: I am not the Christ. I am not. No. Notice the shape of his speech: in a Gospel where Jesus will repeatedly say I AM, the Baptist's testimony is a chain of I am not. His greatness is entirely referential. He defines himself only as a voice from Isaiah 40:3, and that citation carries a quiet bombshell: the voice in Isaiah prepares the way of the LORD, of God Himself. The Baptist is saying that the one coming after him is the coming of God.

Then the cry that titles our study: Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (1:29, repeated 1:35). Here you must exercise deliberate restraint. The Baptist never explains the title, John the Evangelist never explains it here, and neither will you. Participants sealed their guesses last week. Your job this session is to sharpen the strangeness, not resolve it: lambs do not take away sin, sacrificial victims do not walk around Galilee, and no Old Testament text ever calls the Messiah a lamb in so many words. For your own preparation only: the resolution the study is building toward gathers the Passover lamb of Exodus 12, the servant of Isaiah 53 who is led like a lamb to the slaughter, and the daily offering of the *tamid*, and it lands in Session 13, where the group will weigh honestly the long-standing reading of John's Passion chronology that sets the death of Jesus in the hours when the Passover lambs were slain, with hyssop and unbroken bones completing the pattern. Be accurate with yourself here: John dates the sentencing to the day of Preparation of the Passover, about the sixth hour (19:14), and never

states the hour of the death itself, so the synchronization is an inference from his chronology and it is disputed. Session 13 presents it as a reading, not as a datum. Guard the seal.

The call narratives run on two repeated phrases. Jesus' first spoken words in this entire Gospel are a question: What do you seek? (1:38). John has composed carefully; the risen Lord's question to Mary Magdalene in the garden, Whom do you seek? (20:15), closes the arc. Every disciple lives between those two questions. The second phrase is Come and see (1:39), which Philip then repeats verbatim to Nathanael (1:46). Johannine evangelization is not argument but invitation backed by testimony.

Two moments need leader depth. First, the renaming of Simon: You shall be called Cephas (1:42). *Kēphas* is Aramaic for rock, rendered in Greek as Petros. In Scripture, when God renames a man, He is not handing out nicknames; He is announcing a mission and remaking an identity: Abram becomes Abraham, father of nations, and Jacob becomes Israel. John records the rename at the very first meeting and then leaves it hanging like a loaded promise. Christian readers have long heard its discharge in chapter 21, our Session 14, when the risen Lord gives Simon his threefold pastoral commission. John never says so outright; he leaves the name unexplained and lets the commission answer it. Present the link as a reading the Gospel invites, not as a conclusion John states. Plant, do not resolve.

Second, the ladder. Jesus tells Nathanael, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man (1:51). The wording is lifted from Jacob's dream at Bethel in Genesis 28, where Jacob wakes and cries, this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. Jesus places himself where the ladder stood: the image presents him as the new Bethel, the true house of God and gate of heaven, the one place where heaven and earth meet. This locks directly into last week's tabernacle thread: the Word who pitched his tent among us is the meeting place in person. Expect a small thrill in the room when the group finds Genesis 28 themselves.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Isaiah 40:3.** The voice in the wilderness prepares the way of the LORD. The Baptist's self-description, and an implicit claim about who is coming.
- **Malachi 4:5 and Deuteronomy 18:15-18.** The expected Elijah and the prophet like Moses, the background of the delegation's three questions. Leader background; cite from memory rather than turning there.
- **Genesis 17:5 and 32:28.** Abram renamed Abraham, Jacob renamed Israel. Divine renaming announces mission. Optional quick reference during the Cephas question.
- **Genesis 28:10-17.** Jacob's ladder at Bethel, angels ascending and descending, house of God, gate of heaven. The session's climactic live discovery.
- **Isaiah 11:2.** The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him. Background to the Spirit descending and remaining on Jesus (1:32-33).

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Doctor of the Church, Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 7

Commenting on Nathanael under the fig tree, Augustine hears an echo of Eden: the first thing our fallen parents reached for was fig leaves. When Jesus says, before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you, Augustine reads a picture of every conversion: Christ sees us in the

shadow of our sin before we ever catch sight of him. Nathanael thinks the story begins with his decision to come and see; Jesus gently reveals that he was seen, and loved, first.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), Doctor of the Church, Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homily 19

Chrysostom lingers on one small verse: Andrew first found his brother Simon. Having found the Messiah, Andrew could not hold the treasure alone even overnight; he ran to the person nearest his heart. This, Chrysostom says, is true brotherly love, to share spiritual goods and not only earthly ones. He notes with delight that from Andrew's simple act of fetching his brother came the man who would lead the apostles.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. John Henry Newman (1801-1890), Meditations and Devotions

Newman's famous meditation belongs to this chapter of callings: God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael are each found differently, named personally, and sent distinctly. Newman insists the same is true of every one of us: somehow I am necessary for His purposes, a link in a chain, a bond of connexion between persons.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 719-720.** John the Baptist as more than a prophet, the friend of the Bridegroom in whom the Spirit completes the cycle of prophets begun by Elijah.
- **CCC 438.** Jesus as the Christ, the anointed one, manifested to Israel at his baptism when the Spirit descended and remained on him.
- **CCC 858.** Jesus calls those whom he desires by name, and the apostles are the emissaries of his own mission: as the Father has sent me, even so I send you.
- **CCC 878.** The personal character of the call: each one is called personally, by name, to follow him.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

The Lamb (title thread, sealed). The title is spoken aloud this session (1:29, 35) and pointedly left unexplained. Sharpen the mystery in Build question 3, confirm that guesses stay sealed, and move on. Resolves Session 13.

I am not / I AM. The Baptist's testimony is built of denials: I am not the Christ, I am not, no. Quietly note the shape. Jesus' thunderous I AM sayings begin in chapter 6 and peak in 8:58; the contrast is deliberate and the group should discover it later, not now.

What do you seek? Jesus' first words (1:38) form a bracket with his post-resurrection question, whom do you seek? (20:15). Plant only; resolves Session 14.

The rename. You shall be called Cephas (1:42) is a promissory note. Our study hears it honored in 21:15-17, Session 14, in the threefold feed my sheep. Plant only.

Tabernacle and temple. The ladder saying (1:51) advances last week's thread: the Word who tabernacled among us now identifies himself as Bethel, the house of God and gate of heaven. Next session the thread jumps again, to the temple of his body (2:21).

Session Goals

1. Participants can describe the Baptist's identity as pure witness, built entirely of denials and a borrowed voice from Isaiah 40, and can say whose way that voice prepares.
2. Participants register the strangeness of the Lamb of God title and consciously keep their guesses sealed.
3. Participants trace the person-to-person chain of the first callings and identify come and see as the Gospel's model of evangelization.
4. Participants hear the strongest case that Son of God in 1:49 is merely a royal title, and watch the chapter's frame answer it.
5. Participants discover Genesis 28 themselves and can explain what Jesus claims by placing himself in Jacob's dream.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 20 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: the optional Genesis 17 and 32 lookups in Build question 6 (summarize the renames verbally instead), the Dig Deeper box on the week of days, and the second Win question. Do not cut the Genesis 28 live discovery; it is the session's summit. Do not cut Build question 3; the sealed mystery needs its moment of sharpening.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, your first words in this Gospel are a question: what do you seek? Tonight we let you ask it of us. Give us the honesty of Nathanael, the eagerness of Andrew, and the humility of John the Baptist, who wanted only to point at you. Speak, Lord, your servants are listening. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. Have you ever had a nickname that stuck? Who gave it to you, and did it say something true about you?
2. Think of something you love that you only discovered because one specific person invited you. Who was it?

Transition: Tonight nearly everything happens by invitation. Watch how many people in this chapter meet Jesus because somebody they knew came and got them.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 1:19-28 aloud. Then ask:

Question 1. The delegation from Jerusalem asks the Baptist three questions about his identity. List his three answers. What do you notice about the shape of his speech, and what is the only positive thing he is willing to say about himself?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

I am not the Christ. I am not. No. His answers shrink with each question, and every one is a denial. The only positive identity he claims is borrowed from Isaiah: I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. A voice exists only to carry a word; the Baptist has made himself pure testimony. Hold on to the shape of his speech, all those I am nots. This Gospel will eventually give us the counter-melody, and when the group hears it in later sessions, this moment will pay off. Do not explain further now.

Question 2 (live discovery). The Baptist quotes Isaiah. Turn to Isaiah 40:3 and read it slowly. In Isaiah, whose way is the voice told to prepare? Now say it out loud: if the Baptist is the voice, whose arrival is he announcing?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The voice prepares the way of the LORD, and in Isaiah that means God Himself coming to His people. The Baptist has not simply announced a coming teacher or even a coming king. By choosing this verse he has said, as plainly as a first-century Jew could, that the one coming after him is the coming of God. The group met that claim in cosmic language last week, the Word was God. Here it is again in the mouth of a prophet standing in a river.

Question 3. Read 1:29-34. There it is, the sentence our whole study is named for: Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Do not answer it, just interrogate it. What is strange about this title? List everything odd you can find.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Let the strangeness accumulate and resist every urge to resolve it. Odd things the group may surface: a grown man is being called a lamb; lambs are victims, not leaders; no lamb ever took away sin, and no single sacrifice ever addressed the whole world; the expected titles were Messiah, King, Son of David, and lamb was not on anyone's list. And John never explains it. The Baptist says it twice and offers no footnote. Confirm to the group that their guesses from last week stay sealed, tell them the Gospel will answer in its own time, and enjoy their frustration a little. The mystery is doing its work.

Question 4. Stay in 1:32-34. The Baptist says he watched the Spirit descend and remain on Jesus. Prophets and judges in the Old Testament had the Spirit come upon them for a task. Why might John underline that the Spirit remains?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Again and again before, the Spirit came upon men for a mission and a moment, and passed on. On Jesus the Spirit rests permanently, which is exactly what Isaiah 11:2 foresaw of the shoot from Jesse: the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him. The permanence marks Jesus not as the latest in the prophetic line but as its destination, the Anointed One as such. And it makes him, as the Baptist adds, the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit: he does not merely carry the Spirit, he bestows him.

Question 5. Read 1:35-39. Two of the Baptist's own disciples peel off and follow Jesus. Jesus turns and speaks his first words in this entire Gospel. What are they? Why might John want a question, this question, to be the first thing out of Jesus' mouth?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

What do you seek? Not a doctrine, not a demand, a question, aimed at desire. Jesus begins with what the human heart is actually hunting for, because until a person knows what they seek, they cannot recognize it when it stands in front of them. Ask the group to sit with the question personally for ten silent seconds before anyone answers the next question. Note also the eyewitness fingerprint at the end of the passage: it was about the tenth hour. Somebody remembered the exact time of day his life changed.

Question 6. Read 1:40-42. Andrew's first act after finding the Messiah is to go find someone. Who, and what does Jesus do when the two meet? Elsewhere in Scripture, when God changes a man's name, what does it mean? If time allows, glance at Genesis 17:5 and 32:28.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Andrew fetches his brother Simon, and Jesus, on first sight, renames him: you shall be called Cephas, Aramaic for rock. When God renames a man in Scripture it is never a nickname; it is a mission announced and an identity remade. Abram becomes Abraham because he will father nations; Jacob becomes Israel because he has striven with God. So what mission is loaded into rock? John does not say, not yet. The rename sits in the text like a promissory note, and this Gospel does not leave promissory notes unpaid. Tell the group to remember Cephas; the note comes due in our

final session.

Steelman: Son of God, Just a Royal Title?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

Read 1:43-49 first (Philip and Nathanael, ending in Nathanael's confession: Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!). Then build the case honestly. Many careful readers, including many Protestant scholars and most skeptical ones, point out that in the Old Testament, Son of God is royal language, not a claim of divinity. In Psalm 2:7 God says of the Davidic king, you are my son, today I have begotten you. In 2 Samuel 7:14 God promises David regarding his heir, I will be his father, and he shall be my son. Nathanael himself pairs the two titles as parallels: Son of God, King of Israel. He is a startled Israelite hailing his Messiah, the argument runs, not confessing the second person of the Trinity. So, the conclusion presses, John 1 gives us high honors for Jesus but not deity. Give this its full weight; the Old Testament texts are real and Nathanael's parallelism is right there in the verse.

Question 7 (press from the text). Grant everything the steelman says about Nathanael's own understanding in that moment. Now ask: who wrote this chapter, and what did he wrap around it? Recall what verse 1 and verse 18 already told the reader. And notice how Jesus responds to Nathanael in 1:50-51: does he accept the compliment, or raise the stakes?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The steelman is likely right about Nathanael's state of mind: he is hailing his King, and his theology has not caught up with his instincts. But John is not writing a transcript; he is writing an interpretation, and he has framed the entire chapter. Before Nathanael ever speaks, the reader has been told the Word was God (1:1) and that the only Son is in the bosom of the Father and has made God known (1:18). Every title in the chapter is meant to be read inside that frame. And Jesus himself refuses to let the royal title be the ceiling: you shall see greater things than these. He then answers a confession about the Son of God with a claim about the Son of Man on whom the angels of God ascend and descend. Nathanael reached for the highest category he had; Jesus replies, higher still. The Gospel will keep raising the stakes until Thomas runs out of categories entirely in 20:28. Characters in John routinely say more than they know; the evangelist counts on it.

Question 8 (live discovery). Read 1:50-51 again: heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. Jesus is quoting somebody's dream. Turn to Genesis 28:10-17 and read it. What did Jacob see, what was moving on it, and what did Jacob name the place when he woke up? Now put the two passages together: what is Jesus claiming to be?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Jacob saw a ladder set up on earth with its top reaching heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. Waking, he cried: this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven, and he called the place Bethel, house of God. Jesus takes the ladder out of the dream and stands in its place: the angels ascend and descend on the Son of Man. He is claiming to be the ladder, the one point where heaven and earth actually meet, the true Bethel, the house of God

and gate of heaven in person. Now connect last week: the Word pitched his tent among us. Tent, house of God, gate of heaven, the thread is one thread. Wherever God and humanity meet, John keeps saying, that meeting place has a name and a face.

DIG DEEPER

A week of new creation. Scan the time markers: the next day (1:29), the next day (1:35), the next day (1:43), then on the third day (2:1). Many readers hear John counting out an opening week, a quiet answer to the seven days of Genesis 1 that the group discovered behind the Prologue. Where the first creation account crowned its days with man and woman, whom Genesis 2 sets in a garden, this week will end, next session, at a wedding. The evangelist rarely does anything by accident.

Synthesis question. Race through the whole chapter one last time and list out loud every title given to Jesus, by anyone. How many can the group find, and what does the sheer pile-up tell us about what John is doing in his opening chapter?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The Word, God, the true light, the only Son, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, the Son of God (twice, from the Baptist and Nathanael), Rabbi, the Messiah, the Christ, him of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of Israel, the Son of Man. A dozen or more in fifty one verses. John has emptied Israel's entire treasury of hope onto the table in chapter one, and then spends twenty more chapters showing that every title is true, and that even all of them together are not enough. One title in the pile got no explanation at all tonight. Guesses stay sealed.

Send

1. Everyone in this chapter got fetched by somebody: Peter by Andrew, Nathanael by Philip. Who fetched you? And whose Andrew might you be right now?
2. Philip did not argue with Nathanael's skepticism; he just said come and see. What would come and see look like for a skeptical friend of yours, concretely, this month?

Live It This Week

- **Let him ask you.** Once this week, take ten minutes of real silence and let Jesus ask you his first question: what do you seek? Answer him honestly, even if the honest answer is confused.
- **Be an Andrew.** Andrew's evangelization method was one sentence and one introduction. Pick one person by name this week and make one small introduction: an invitation, a question, a mention of what you are finding here.
- **Listen for it at Mass.** This Sunday, just before Communion, the priest will lift the Host and say words you have now heard at their source: Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Do not solve it. Just notice that the Church has put the Baptist's unexplained cry at the summit of her worship, and hold your sealed guess a little tighter.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, Lamb of God, we do not yet understand your strangest title, but we behold you all the same. Thank you for the people who fetched us, the Andrews and Philips who said come and see. Make us voices like the Baptist, pointing away from ourselves. And this week, when you ask us what we seek, give us the courage to answer truly. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 1:29

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 2, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 1:19-28** · opening reading, the delegation's three questions, the Baptist's denials, the voice
- **Isaiah 40:3** · live discovery, the voice prepares the way of the LORD
- **Malachi 4:5 and Deuteronomy 18:15-18** · leader background only, Elijah and the prophet like Moses
- **John 1:29-34** · Behold, the Lamb of God; the Spirit descends and remains
- **Isaiah 11:2** · leader reference, the Spirit shall rest upon him
- **John 1:35-39** · what do you seek, come and see, the tenth hour
- **John 20:15** · leader reference only, whom do you seek, the far bracket; do not read in session
- **John 1:40-42** · Andrew fetches Simon, you shall be called Cephas
- **Genesis 17:5 and 32:28** · optional quick lookups, Abram renamed, Jacob renamed
- **John 1:43-49** · Philip and Nathanael, can anything good come out of Nazareth, the confession
- **Psalms 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14** · steelman texts, Son of God as royal title; cite verbally or turn there if time allows
- **John 1:50-51** · greater things, angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man
- **Genesis 28:10-17** · live discovery, Jacob's ladder, Bethel, house of God, gate of heaven
- **CCC 438, 719-720, 858, 878** · Catechism connections

BEHOLD THE LAMB: SESSION 3

The First Sign

John 2: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that Jesus' first sign and his first public act in Jerusalem are two halves of one announcement: the water of the old purification becomes the wine of the messianic feast, and the temple of stone gives way to the temple of his body. Along the way they meet two phrases that will govern the rest of the study: my hour has not yet come, and do whatever he tells you.

Catholic Touchstone: Mary's intercession and the sacramental imagination. At Cana the mother of Jesus states a need, directs the servants to her Son, and the first sign follows: the Church has always seen here the pattern of her intercession (CCC 2618). And the sign itself, ordinary water made the bearer of glory, is the shape of every sacrament.

What You Need to Know

John 2:1 opens on the third day, completing the week of days your group spotted last session and ringing a bell every Christian ear should hear. The first creation account crowned its week with man and woman, whom Genesis 2 places in a garden; John's new-creation week ends at a wedding. Weddings are not incidental scenery in Scripture. The prophets promised that God would espouse His people (Hosea 2:19-20, Isaiah 62:4-5), and the messianic age was pictured as a wedding feast overflowing with wine (Isaiah 25:6, Amos 9:13-14). When the wine runs out at a wedding in Israel and someone quietly supplies the best wine in impossible abundance, a reader formed by the prophets knows what hour is striking, even though, as Jesus says, the Hour has not yet come.

That word deserves your full attention. My hour has not yet come (2:4) plants the single most important time-word in this Gospel. The Hour recurs like a drumbeat: they could not arrest him because his hour had not yet come (7:30, 8:20), and then the drum changes rhythm: the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified (12:23), Jesus knowing that his hour had come (13:1), Father, the hour has come (17:1). Track it with the group from tonight forward on the Thread Watch, and resolve nothing. When they finally see what the Hour is, in Session 13, the whole Gospel will snap into focus.

Jesus addresses his mother as Woman, and the exchange in 2:4 reads abruptly in English. Handle it with precision, because the steelman chain lives here. The idiom, literally what to me and to you, does signal distance or a divergence of concern elsewhere in Scripture, and the address Woman, while respectful, is highly unusual from a son to his mother; no clear parallel is attested in the surviving ancient evidence. But John has composed with a long horizon: the mother of Jesus appears exactly twice in this Gospel, here at Cana where the Hour is announced as not yet, and at the cross where the Hour arrives, and in both scenes Jesus calls her Woman (19:26). The evangelist who opened his Gospel rewriting Genesis knows what the word Woman means in Genesis 3:15. Many Fathers heard the new Eve here. The Church has not defined the exegesis of this verse, so keep your language honest and hedged, but do not let the group miss that the pairing of the two scenes is deliberate.

Mary's two sentences are a school of prayer in miniature. They have no wine: she does not instruct, she presents the need. Do whatever he tells you: her last recorded words in all of Scripture, and they point every servant, and every reader, away from herself to her Son. There is an old echo here worth knowing: when Egypt starved, Pharaoh told the people, go to Joseph; what he says to you, do (Genesis 41:55). Mary speaks with the same grammar about the true provider.

The six stone jars are for the Jewish rites of purification, holding twenty or thirty gallons each: run the math with the group, roughly a hundred and twenty to a hundred and eighty gallons. Jesus does not conjure wine from nothing. He takes the water of the old covenant's washing and makes it the wine of the wedding feast, in staggering excess, and the steward's astonished line, you have kept the good wine until now, is John winking at salvation history itself. Note also John's vocabulary: this, the first of his *signs* (2:11). John never borrows the Synoptics' usual word for mighty works, *dynamis*; he speaks of Jesus' works, *erga*, and for the miracles; he says *sēmeion*, sign, a thing that points beyond itself. Tonight your group starts a running tally. John numbers the first sign here and the second at 4:54, then stops counting and lets the reader keep the tally. Most readers across the centuries have counted seven before the cross. Your group hunts for them from now on; do not give them the list.

The temple cleansing (2:13-22) is placed by John at the first of three Passovers in this Gospel; keep an eye on that word Passover, for reasons the sealed guesses will one day appreciate. Jesus calls the temple my Father's house, an ownership claim, and the disciples remember Psalm 69:9, zeal for thy house will consume me. Pressed for a sign of his authority, he answers: destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. His hearers gesture at forty six years of Herodian construction; John hands the reader the key: he spoke of the temple of his body (2:21). Your tabernacle thread now runs tent (1:14), Bethel and its ladder (1:51), temple of his body (2:21). God's dwelling among men has been narrowing to a single human body for three sessions. The chapter closes on a caution (2:23-25): many believed because of the signs, and Jesus did not trust himself to them. Sign-faith is a beginning, not an arrival, and John will spend chapter 3 showing what must happen next.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Isaiah 25:6.** The feast the LORD will make on the mountain, of rich food and well-aged wine. Live discovery during the Cana half.
- **Amos 9:13-14 and Hosea 2:19-20.** Mountains dripping sweet wine; God espousing His people forever. Leader background for the wedding and wine symbolism.
- **Genesis 3:15.** The woman and her seed. Background to the address Woman at Cana and Calvary. Leader background, hedged language.
- **Genesis 41:55.** Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do. The old grammar behind Mary's do whatever he tells you. Optional quick reference.
- **Psalm 69:9.** Zeal for thy house will consume me. Cited by the disciples in the text itself; note the psalm is a suffering psalm, quoted again at the cross tradition.
- **Malachi 3:1-3.** The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, and who can stand when he appears, for he is like a refiner's fire. Live discovery during the temple half.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Doctor of the Church, Tractates on

the Gospel of John, Tractate 8

Augustine defuses the skeptic's shrug with a single observation: the one who made wine that day in the six jars does the same thing every year in the vines. Water falling from the sky is turned into wine by way of the vine, and no one marvels, because it happens annually. The miracle at Cana is creation's ordinary wonder compressed into a moment so that our dulled attention would finally notice who has been doing it all along.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-202), *Against Heresies* 3.22.4

Irenaeus, who tells us elsewhere (*Against Heresies* 3.3.4) that he learned from Polycarp, a hearer of John, draws the great parallel behind the word Woman: the knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience. What the virgin Eve bound through unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed through faith. Irenaeus is expounding Mary's fiat, not the wedding at Cana; 3.22.4 does not comment on this chapter. The Cana link is this study's application of his typology: the same obedient faith that untied Eve's knot speaks its whole rule of life at Cana in five words, do whatever he tells you.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), *Doctor of the Church, Commentary on the Gospel of John, on chapter 2*

Aquinas reads Cana as a portrait of Mary's way of interceding: she notices the need before anyone asks, she brings it to her Son with total confidence, and she presumes nothing about the method or the timing, telling the servants only to obey him. For Aquinas her words show mercy and faith working together: mercy sees that the wine has failed; faith knows exactly where to take the problem.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 2618.** Mary's intercession at Cana: her prayer of faith obtains the first sign, and at the hour of the New Covenant she is present at the cross.
- **CCC 1613.** The Church attaches great importance to Jesus' presence at the wedding at Cana: the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the announcement that marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence.
- **CCC 547-548.** The signs of Jesus: works that bear witness to who he is and invite belief, while refusing to be mere spectacle.
- **CCC 586.** Jesus identified himself with the temple by presenting himself as God's definitive dwelling place among men; his body, destroyed and raised, is the true temple.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

The Hour (NEW, major thread). Planted tonight at 2:4, my hour has not yet come. It recurs at 7:30 and 8:20 as a shield (they could not arrest him) and turns at 12:23, 13:1, and 17:1 into the hour has come. Track every occurrence with the group from tonight on; resolve nothing until Session 13.

The seven signs tally (NEW mechanic). Start a visible tally, a whiteboard corner or a page in

someone's notebook. Sign 1: water into wine (2:11, numbered by John himself). John numbers only the first two, then hands the count to the reader. Do not give the group the traditional list of seven; let them argue about what counts as the study proceeds.

Woman at Cana, Woman at the cross. The mother of Jesus appears exactly twice in John, both times addressed as Woman, once when the Hour is not yet and once when it arrives. Plant quietly tonight; the far end is 19:25-27, Session 13.

Tabernacle and temple. Big advance: tent (1:14), Bethel (1:51), and now the temple of his body (2:21). Name the progression aloud when the group discovers 2:21; this thread is now visible enough to trace on the tally board.

The Lamb (sealed) and Passover. The word Passover appears at 2:13, the first of three in this Gospel. Say nothing. Simply make sure the group notices the word is there. The sealed guesses are quietly gaining interest.

Sign-faith versus real faith. Planted at 2:23-25: many believed because of signs, and Jesus did not trust himself to them. Develops immediately next session with Nicodemus, and runs through 4:48, 6:26, and 20:29.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain what the wedding, the wine, and the third day would signal to a reader formed by the prophets.
2. Participants hear the strongest version of the claim that Jesus rebukes Mary at Cana, and weigh it against the full Johannine frame.
3. Participants register my hour has not yet come and begin tracking the Hour thread.
4. Participants do the math on the jars, articulate the movement from purification water to wedding wine, and start the seven signs tally.
5. Participants discover that the temple saying is about the temple of his body and can recite the dwelling-place progression: tent, Bethel, body.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 20 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: the Genesis 41:55 quick reference in Build question 3, the Dig Deeper box on the three Passovers, and the second Send question. Do not cut the steelman chain, the jar math, or the Malachi 3:1 live discovery. The Hour must be named and put on the board even if you are sprinting.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Father, at a wedding in Galilee your Son turned the water of washing into the wine of joy. Tonight, take what is plain in us, our attention, our questions, our ordinary hour together, and change it into something that gladdens your heart. Mary, mother of Jesus, you noticed what was lacking before anyone asked; notice what is lacking in us, and tell us to do whatever he tells us. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. What is the best wedding you have ever been to, and what single detail made it unforgettable?
2. Tell about a time something ran out at the worst possible moment, money, food, gas, time, and it became a story you now enjoy telling.

Transition: John has spent a week of days introducing Jesus with titles. Tonight Jesus finally acts, and his first act is not a sermon or an exorcism. It is a rescue at a party.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 2:1-5 aloud. Then ask:

Question 1. Look at Mary's two sentences in this passage. What does she actually say, and just as important, what does she never say? What kind of asking is this?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

She says, they have no wine, and to the servants, do whatever he tells you. She never instructs Jesus, never proposes a method, never even phrases a request. She presents a need to the person she trusts and then removes herself from the middle. The Church has always seen in these two sentences the whole anatomy of intercession: notice the need, bring it to him, point others to him, presume nothing about how or when. And note the small astonishment: do whatever he tells you are the last recorded words of Mary in all of Scripture. Her final word in the Bible is an arrow aimed entirely at her Son.

Steelman: Does Jesus Rebuke His Mother?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

Verse 4 sounds harsh, and many Protestant readers say Catholics refuse to hear it. Build their case properly. Jesus answers his mother: O woman, what have you to do with me? The underlying idiom, literally what to me and to you, appears elsewhere in Scripture, and almost always to mark distance or a clash of concerns: Jephthah uses it against an aggressor king (Judges 11:12), the widow of Zarephath uses it against Elijah in grief (1 Kings 17:18), and the demons hurl it at Jesus (Mark 5:7). Add the address Woman, which scarcely any son in surviving ancient literature uses for his mother, and the plain reading, the argument runs, is a gentle but real rebuke: Jesus is marking that his mission runs on his Father's clock, not his mother's suggestions, and Catholic devotion to Mary's intercession is built on a verse that actually pushes the other way. Give this its full weight. The

idiom evidence is real, and the tension in the verse is really there.

Question 2 (press from the text). Grant the idiom its distance and grant that the address is strange. Now read the scene to the end. What does Mary do immediately after this supposed rebuff, and what does Jesus then actually do? And one more thing: this Gospel shows us the mother of Jesus in exactly one other scene. If anyone recalls where, what does Jesus call her there?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Take verse 4 at full strength as a real check, a distancing, and watch what it does not do: it does not close the door. Mary responds not by withdrawing but by confidently mobilizing the servants, and Jesus responds not by abstaining but by performing the most lavish miracle of supply in the Gospels. Whatever the idiom marks, it does not mark a no; the story itself refuses that reading. The distance in the verse is real but it is temporal: my hour has not yet come. Jesus is saying that what she is nudging into motion belongs to a timetable larger than a wedding, and then, astonishingly, he moves anyway, at her faith. The other scene is the cross (19:25-27), where the Hour has come and he again says Woman. The evangelist who rewrote Genesis 1 in his first sentence has placed the Woman at both ends of the Hour, and many Fathers heard Genesis 3:15 underneath it, the woman whose seed crushes the serpent. The Church has not defined the exegesis of this verse, so hold the typology with open hands, but hold it: John does not spend words by accident, and he spent Woman twice.

Question 3. Do whatever he tells you. If you wrote those five words on a card and made them your only rule for one week, what would they cost you? If time allows, glance at Genesis 41:55 and enjoy the echo: whose words is Mary's sentence built on, and who was the Joseph of that story?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Let the personal question breathe; it is a Send question smuggled into Build, and it should sting a little. The echo: when Egypt starved, Pharaoh told the people, go to Joseph; what he says to you, do, and Joseph opened the storehouses. Mary speaks with the same grammar about the true provider, whose storehouse is about to open six jars wide.

Question 4 (live discovery). Read 2:6-10. John gives us an oddly specific inventory: six stone jars, for the Jewish rites of purification, holding twenty or thirty gallons each. Do the math out loud. Then ask two questions: why tell us the volume, and why tell us what the jars were for? Finally, send the group to Isaiah 25:6 and read what the prophets said the LORD would one day serve.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The math lands between one hundred twenty and one hundred eighty gallons, on the order of seven hundred modern bottles, for a village wedding already days along. The volume preaches superabundance: when the messianic age arrives, God does not ration. The jars' purpose preaches transformation: this was the water of the old covenant's washing, the endless purification that addressed ritual purity, hands and vessels, while awaiting the cleansing of hearts the prophets promised, and Jesus turns precisely that water into wedding wine. Isaiah 25:6 promised a feast of well-aged wine on the LORD's mountain for all peoples; the steward's bewildered compliment, you have kept the good wine until now, is truer than he knows. It is John's one-line theology of salvation

history.

Question 5. Read 2:11-12. John calls this the first of his signs, and says Jesus manifested his glory. Two small words to interrogate: why sign rather than miracle, and where has this Gospel used glory before?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

John never uses the ordinary Gospel word for mighty works; he says sign, a thing whose whole job is to point past itself. A person who stops at the wonder has missed the sign, a theme John will hammer in chapter 6. And glory: we have beheld his glory (1:14), the tabernacle word. The glory that filled the tent of meeting flickered into view at a wedding table. Start the tally now: Sign 1, water into wine. Tell the group John numbers this one and one more, then stops counting and hands the reader the pen. Their standing assignment for the rest of the study: keep the tally, argue about what counts, and see how many signs they find before the cross. Give them nothing further.

Have someone read John 2:13-22 aloud. Then ask:

Question 6 (live discovery). What does Jesus do in the temple courts, and, listen closely to his words, whose house does he say it is? Then send the group to Malachi 3:1-3. Who did Malachi say would suddenly come to the temple, and what would he do when he arrived?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He makes a whip of cords, drives out the sellers and the animals, pours out the coins, and says: you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade. My Father's house is an ownership claim; no prophet ever talked that way about the temple. Malachi promised that the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, like a refiner's fire, purifying until offerings are pleasing again. The group discovered at Isaiah 40:3 that the Baptist was preparing the way of the LORD. Here is the arrival Malachi described: the Lord, suddenly, at his temple, refining. The zeal the disciples remember from Psalm 69 belongs to a psalm of a righteous sufferer, and that detail is a shadow falling forward.

Question 7. Read 2:18-22 again. Asked for a sign of his authority, Jesus says: destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. His hearers scoff about forty six years of construction. What does verse 21 tell the reader that the crowd could not know? And connect the thread: where has this Gospel already located God's dwelling among men?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He spoke of the temple of his body. The pattern of misunderstanding begins here and will recur all Gospel long: Jesus speaks on one level, hearers land on a lower one, and John quietly hands the reader the key. Now say the thread out loud and put it on the board next to the sign tally: the Word pitched his tent among us (1:14); at 1:51 the angels of God ascend and descend on the Son of Man, so Jesus himself now stands where Bethel stood in Jacob's dream, the place where heaven and earth meet; and now, the temple of his body (2:21). For three sessions God's dwelling place has been narrowing, from a tent, to a ladder touching heaven, to a single human body. Ask the group where they think the thread is headed and accept all answers without confirming any.

Question 8. Read 2:23-25. Many believed in his name when they saw the signs, and Jesus did not trust himself to them. That sounds almost cold. What is John distinguishing, and why end the chapter of the first sign with a warning about sign-faith?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

John distinguishes belief that follows spectacle from belief that entrusts the self. Sign-faith is a beginning, not an arrival. John does not tell us these believers were insincere; he tells us Jesus did not entrust himself to them, and he will press the point again at 4:48, 6:26, and 20:29. Jesus knew what was in man, and what is in man is a heart that must be remade, not merely impressed. John ends the chapter here on purpose, because the very next verse introduces a man, Nicodemus, who comes impressed by the signs, and Jesus will tell him that being impressed is not enough: he must be born again from above. That is next session, and the group should leave tonight feeling the question: is my faith sign-faith?

DIG DEEPER

Three Passovers. John 2:13 is the first of three Passovers John marks in his Gospel (2:13, 6:4, and the final one from 11:55 onward). The other Gospels compress the ministry into one journey to Jerusalem; John's three Passovers are why the Church has traditionally spoken of a roughly three-year public ministry. Keep an eye on that feast. This study is named Behold the Lamb, and John keeps checking the Passover calendar. Draw no conclusions aloud.

Synthesis question. Put the two halves of the chapter side by side: water made wine, and the temple claimed and reinterpreted. What is the one announcement both scenes are making?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Both scenes announce fulfillment by transformation: the purification water of the old covenant becomes the wedding wine of the new, and the temple of stone gives way to the temple of his body. In both, something good and God-given is not discarded but raised into what it was always pointing toward, and in both, the full event is dated to a timetable no one else can see: my hour has not yet come, and in three days I will raise it up. The chapter is one claim in two keys: the age the prophets promised has walked in the door, and it is a person.

Send

1. Mary's method was to name the lack: they have no wine. If you named your life's current they have no wine to Jesus tonight, what would it be?
2. Jesus drove out of his Father's house what did not belong there. St. Paul calls your body a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). What would he drive out of yours, and would you hand him the whip?

Live It This Week

- **Pray Cana-style.** Once this day, every day, bring one need to Jesus in Mary's grammar: no instructions, no proposed solutions, just they have no wine, and trust. If you pray with Mary, ask her to present it with you.

- **One act of whatever.** Pick one thing you already know he is telling you to do, the one you have been deferring, and do it this week. Do whatever he tells you begins with the whatever you already know.
- **Watch the water.** At Mass this Sunday, watch the priest add a little water to the wine in the chalice and remember the six jars. Ordinary matter, an ordinary hour, and glory arriving quietly through it: that is Cana, and it lights up the whole sacramental principle.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, your hour had not yet come, and still you gave the best wine because your mother asked. We bring you our empty jars, our routines, our purifications that never quite make us clean, and we ask you to change what we cannot. Cleanse the temple of our hearts; overturn what needs overturning. And keep us watchful for your Hour. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 2:5

His mother said to the servants, Do whatever he tells you. (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 3, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 2:1-5** · opening reading, the third day, they have no wine, do whatever he tells you
- **Judges 11:12, 1 Kings 17:18, Mark 5:7** · steelman texts, the what to me and to you idiom; cite verbally
- **John 19:25-27** · leader reference only, Woman at the cross; do not read in session, resolves Session 13
- **Genesis 3:15** · leader background, the Woman and her seed; hedged typology
- **Genesis 41:55** · optional quick reference, go to Joseph, what he says to you, do
- **John 2:6-10** · the six jars, the math, the steward's compliment
- **Isaiah 25:6** · live discovery, the feast of well-aged wine on the mountain
- **Amos 9:13-14, Hosea 2:19-20, Isaiah 62:4-5** · leader background, wine and espousal in the prophets
- **John 2:11-12** · the first of his signs, manifested his glory; the tally begins
- **John 2:13-17** · the temple cleansing, my Father's house, zeal for thy house (Psalm 69:9 cited in text)
- **Malachi 3:1-3** · live discovery, the Lord suddenly coming to his temple as refiner
- **John 2:18-22** · destroy this temple, forty six years, the temple of his body
- **John 2:23-25** · sign-faith, Jesus knew what was in man
- **1 Corinthians 6:19** · Send question 2, your body a temple of the Holy Spirit
- **CCC 547-548, 586, 1613, 2618** · Catechism connections

Born of Water and the Spirit

John 3: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that the most famous verse in the Bible sits inside a conversation about being born, and that the birth Jesus describes, of water and the Spirit, is exactly what Ezekiel promised and exactly what the Church has always found in the font. They also watch the Baptist hand over the bridegroom's bride and speak the most freeing sentence in the Gospel: he must increase, but I must decrease.

Catholic Touchstone: Baptismal regeneration. Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (3:5). The Church has read this verse of Baptism with striking, near-total unanimity among extant witnesses from the second century onward (CCC 1215, 1225), and tonight's steelman chain lets the group test that reading against the strongest alternatives.

What You Need to Know

John has set up this chapter with a hinge so quiet most readers miss it. Chapter 2 ended: he knew what was in man. Chapter 3 begins: now there was a man of the Pharisees. Nicodemus walks in as Exhibit A of what is in man, and specifically of the sign-faith Jesus would not entrust himself to: Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs. He arrives by night, and in this Gospel, after 1:5 and before 3:19-21, night is never just a time of day. Nicodemus is a sincere man still standing in the dark, and John will let us watch him for a long time. Track him: he resurfaces at 7:50 defending due process, and he appears once more, in daylight, at a moment your group will reach in Session 13. Say nothing; just know his arc is one of the Gospel's quiet masterpieces.

Jesus' opening volley turns on a deliberate double meaning. The adverb *anōthen* means both again and from above. Nicodemus hears again and imagines the absurdity of re-entering the womb; Jesus means from above, a birth whose origin is God. The misunderstanding pattern the group met at the temple (destroy this temple) is now established as method: Jesus speaks on the upper level, the hearer lands on the lower one, and the correction lifts everyone higher.

The center of the session is 3:5: unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Prepare the steelman with care, because this is one of the live fault lines between Catholic and much Protestant reading, and your group deserves both sides at full strength. The Catholic case does not rest on one verse in isolation. It rests on the grammar (one preposition governs water and Spirit, one birth with two named agents, not two births), on the Old Testament background Jesus expects Nicodemus to know (Ezekiel 36:25-27, where clean water and a new spirit arrive together in the new covenant cleansing, which is why Jesus can say, are you a teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand?), on the drenched context (the Baptist baptizing in chapters 1 and 3, Jesus' own baptizing ministry in the very next paragraph, 3:22, which 4:2 clarifies was carried out by his disciples), and on the united voice of the early Church, whose extant commentators read 3:5 of Baptism with striking

unanimity. St. Justin Martyr is already joining Jesus' new-birth saying to the water washing by about the year 155, within living memory of the apostolic generation.

One pastoral landmine to defuse in advance: if Baptism is necessary, what about the unbaptized, the person who never had the chance, the child who died, the good man who never heard? The Catechism answers with a sentence worth memorizing: God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments (CCC 1257). The Church holds together the real necessity of the sacrament with baptism of blood, baptism of desire, and hope for those who through no fault of their own never knew the Gospel or the command (CCC 1258-1260); and for children who die without Baptism she entrusts them to the mercy of God, whose desire is that all be saved (CCC 1261). Say this plainly if the question arises; it usually does, and an honest answer here builds trust for everything else.

The second live discovery is the bronze serpent. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up (3:14). Numbers 21 is one of the strangest scenes in the Torah: the remedy for the snake-bitten is an image of the very affliction, raised on a pole, healing everyone who looks at it in obedient faith. Jesus makes it his own blueprint. Note the loaded verb: *hypsōthēnai*, to be lifted up, means both hoisted physically and exalted in glory, and John will use it in three great sayings (3:14, 8:28, 12:32-34). A new thread starts tonight. In this Gospel, the cross is not the humiliation before the exaltation; the lifting up is the exaltation. That inversion is the deepest thing John ever says, and the group should be allowed to grow into it slowly.

Then the verse everyone knows, restored to the context almost no one knows: for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son (3:16). It follows directly from the serpent logic, and the verb gave carries the weight of handed over. Many hear beneath only Son the oldest and most terrible only son in Scripture: take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love (Genesis 22:2). Abraham's hand was stayed; the Father's was not, because this time the Father was not testing love but proving it. The Church has not defined this typology, so offer it with hedged language, but the Fathers heard it, and it preaches.

The chapter closes with the Baptist's finale (3:25-30). Told that everyone is defecting to Jesus, he answers with the parable of the best man: he who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Connect the thread aloud: two sessions ago Jesus supplied the wine at a wedding as if he were the bridegroom responsible for it, and now the Baptist names him the bridegroom outright. The obvious question, which you should plant and refuse to answer, is: then who is the bride? Hold that question in your pocket. Next session Jesus meets a woman at a well, and every Old Testament reader knows what happens when a man meets a woman at a well. The Baptist's last sentence, he must increase, but I must decrease, is the whole spiritual life in eight words, and it belongs in the Send.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Ezekiel 36:25-27.** I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and a new spirit I will put within you. The new covenant cleansing that pairs water and spirit, and the reason Jesus expects the teacher of Israel to understand. Central live discovery.
- **Numbers 21:4-9.** The bronze serpent lifted on the pole, healing all who look in faith. Live discovery for 3:14-15.
- **Ezekiel 37:1-10.** The breath and the wind and the spirit, one word doing three jobs, breathed into the dry bones. Leader background for the pneuma wordplay of 3:8.

- **Genesis 22:2.** Your son, your only son, whom you love. The shadow beneath 3:16. Leader background, hedged typology.
- **Hosea 2:19-20 and Isaiah 62:5.** God as the bridegroom of His people. Background to the Baptist's friend of the bridegroom.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165), First Apology 61

Writing around the year 155, Justin describes for the Roman emperor exactly how Christians are made: those who believe are brought where there is water and are washed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, recalling Christ's saying, unless you are born again, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. The form Justin quotes is the new-birth saying rather than the exact water-and-Spirit wording of 3:5, but the link is already made: within living memory of the apostles, the Church joined Jesus' command about being born again to the washing in water, and read that washing as the way one is born. This is not a medieval development; it is one of the earliest surviving substantial descriptions of Christian initiation we possess.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313-386), Doctor of the Church, Catechetical Lecture 3 (On Baptism) and Mystagogical Catechesis 2

Instructing his candidates before their baptism, Cyril insists on both halves of Jesus' sentence: neither water alone without the Spirit, nor the Spirit alone without water, but the two together, for the body is washed while the soul is sealed. And in the mystagogical lectures given after Easter, explaining to the newly baptized what had just happened to them, he calls the font both tomb and mother: they descend into the water as into a grave and come up born into a new life. The Church's catechesis has never talked about Baptism any other way.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), Doctor of the Church, Homilies on the Gospel of John, on chapter 3

Chrysostom reaches for the boldest image: what the womb is to the child, he says, the water is to the believer. In the beginning the Spirit hovered over the waters and creation was born; now the Spirit moves over the font and the new creation is born. Where Nicodemus joked about a man entering his mother's womb a second time, Chrysostom answers that God has in fact provided a second womb.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1215.** Baptism as the bath of regeneration and renewal, the birth of water and the Spirit without which no one can enter the kingdom of God.
- **CCC 1225.** The connection of Baptism to the blood and water flowing from the pierced side of the crucified Jesus, and to being born of water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom.
- **CCC 1257-1261.** The necessity of Baptism held together with God's freedom: God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments. Baptism of blood, baptism of desire, and hope for those who never knew the command.
- **CCC 458.** The Word became flesh so that we might know God's love, quoting John 3:16 directly.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

Lifted up (NEW). Planted at 3:14. The verb means both hoisted and exalted, and it recurs at 8:28 and 12:32-34. In John the cross is the glorification. Track all three sayings; the thread converges with the Hour in Session 13.

The bridegroom and the bride (NEW). Cana made Jesus the supplier of the wedding wine; tonight the Baptist names him the bridegroom (3:29). Plant the question, who is the bride, and refuse to answer. Next session opens at a well, and Genesis 24, 29, and Exodus 2 all know what wells are for.

Light and darkness. Advances hard tonight: Nicodemus comes by night (3:2), and the discourse ends in the verdict, men loved darkness rather than light (3:19-21). The far end of Nicodemus' own arc is 19:39, Session 13, in daylight. Leader knowledge only.

Born of God. The Prologue's phrase (1:12-13) gets its mechanism tonight: born of water and the Spirit. Name the resolution aloud when the group connects it; this is the study's first fully resolved thread and the group should feel the click.

Sign-faith versus real faith. Nicodemus arrives on sign-faith (3:2, no one can do these signs). The chapter shows what sign-faith must become: birth from above.

The Hour and the Lamb (sealed). Neither advances tonight. Keep the tally board visible anyway; constancy is what makes the payoff land.

Session Goals

1. Participants catch the anōthen double meaning and can describe John's misunderstanding-and-elevation pattern.
2. Participants discover Ezekiel 36:25-27 themselves and can explain why Jesus expected the teacher of Israel to understand water and Spirit.
3. Participants hear the strongest non-baptismal readings of 3:5 and weigh them against grammar, context, Ezekiel, and the near-total baptismal consensus of the early Christian writers whose comment on this verse survives.
4. Participants discover the bronze serpent and can articulate what it predicts about how the Son of Man saves; the lifted up thread begins.
5. Participants can restate John 3:16 in its context of handing over, and hear the Baptist's he must increase as a personal word.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 20 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: the Dig Deeper box on the wind wordplay and Ezekiel 37, Build question 8 on the verdict of light (fold its point into the closing prayer), and the second Win question. Do not cut the steelman chain, the Ezekiel 36 discovery, or the Numbers 21 discovery. If the unbaptized question arises, take the time; CCC 1257 is worth five minutes of anyone's evening.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Father, you loved the world like this: you gave your only Son. Tonight a teacher came to him at night with careful questions, and left with his categories in ruins. Do the same to us if you must. Send the wind of your Spirit where it wills, and let it blow through this room. We ask it through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. Have you ever had to start something completely over, a project, a plan, a season of life, because patching it up was no longer possible? What did starting over cost, and what did it give?
2. Nicodemus brings his hardest questions at night. Where and when do you do your best wrestling with the big questions?

Transition: Last week ended with a warning: Jesus would not entrust himself to sign-faith, because he knew what was in man. Watch how the very next verse begins.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 3:1-8 aloud. Then ask:

Question 1. Gather everything John tells us about Nicodemus in the first two verses: his party, his rank, his timing, and his opening line. Now set 2:25 next to 3:1 and read them in sequence. What is John doing, and in this Gospel, what might by night be doing?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

A Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, very likely of the council (compare 7:50), and his opening line is textbook sign-faith: we know you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs. John has hinged the chapters deliberately: he knew what was in man... now there was a man. Nicodemus walks in as the specimen. And he comes by night: caution, certainly, a ruler protecting his reputation, but this Gospel has been running a light and darkness thread since its fifth verse, and John never wastes a clock. A sincere man, still in the dark, comes toward the light. Tell the group to remember this man; the Gospel is not finished with him.

Question 2. Jesus answers a compliment with a demolition: unless one is born anōthen, he cannot see the kingdom of God. The Greek word means both again and from above, and Nicodemus grabs one meaning while Jesus intends the other. Where have we already seen this pattern of talking past each other, and what is the pattern for?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

At the temple: Jesus said destroy this temple, the crowd heard architecture, and he meant his body. The pattern is now method: Jesus speaks from the upper level, the hearer lands on the lower one, and the misunderstanding becomes the staircase. Nicodemus' womb joke is not stupidity; it is the sound of a man whose categories have just been declared insufficient. Jesus is not asking the old man to improve. He is telling him that improvement is not the unit of measure; birth is. Nobody

contributes to their own birth, which is precisely the point.

Question 3 (live discovery). Jesus sharpens it in verse 5: born of water and the Spirit. Then in verse 10 he says something almost rude: are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? So the answer must already be sitting in Israel's Scriptures. Send the group to Ezekiel 36:25-27 and have them read it aloud slowly. What two things does God promise there, and in what order?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean... a new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you. Water, then spirit, together, in one promised act of new covenant cleansing that God performs on a people who cannot clean themselves. This is why Jesus can be astonished at Nicodemus: the teacher of Israel had the answer sheet in his own scroll case. Born of water and the Spirit is not a riddle from nowhere; it is Ezekiel 36 standing up and walking. Let the group feel the click before you move to the steelman, because the discovery they just made is itself one of the strongest arguments in it.

Steelman: Is Born of Water Really About Baptism?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

Many Evangelical readers, including serious scholars, argue that Catholics load too much into 3:5, and their case deserves its full weight. It runs on three legs. First, context: Jesus rebukes Nicodemus for not already understanding (3:10), and Nicodemus could not possibly have known about a Christian sacrament that did not yet exist, so water must mean something available to him, perhaps natural birth, the water of the womb, paralleling verse 6, that which is born of the flesh is flesh; or perhaps water is simply a metaphor for the cleansing word of God. Second, emphasis: the chapter's own refrain is believing, four times over (3:15, 16, 18, 36), with no ritual in sight; whoever believes has eternal life, full stop. Third, theology: making a ceremony necessary for salvation seems to trade grace for mechanism, faith for plumbing. On this reading, born again names the interior miracle of conversion, and Baptism is its sign, not its cause. State all three legs fairly and let them stand a moment.

Question 4 (press from the text). Take the legs one at a time. On the first: what did the group just find in Ezekiel, and does it answer the claim that Nicodemus had nothing to work with? On the second: look at what surrounds this conversation, 1:26-33 before it and 3:22 immediately after it. What activity is this entire section of the Gospel soaked in? Then consider the grammar and the witnesses.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Leg one collapses on Ezekiel: Jesus rebukes Nicodemus precisely because water and spirit together were already in the prophets, which also rules out the womb reading, since Ezekiel's water is cleansing water, not amniotic, and its plain sense is cleansing water, and ancient readers overwhelmingly took it so. Leg two inverts on inspection: the Baptist has been baptizing since chapter 1, he was told the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:33), and the very next paragraph after this discourse shows Jesus and his disciples baptizing in Judea (3:22; 4:2 adds that Jesus himself did not baptize, but his disciples did). John has soaked the whole section in baptism

and then placed a saying about water and Spirit in the middle of it; a metaphor reading has to fight the entire neighborhood. The grammar adds its word: one preposition governs both nouns, born of water and Spirit, one birth with two named agents, not a natural birth plus a spiritual one. And the witnesses close the case historically: the Fathers who treat this verse, beginning with Justin Martyr around 155, within living memory of the apostles, read it of Baptism with a unanimity almost unmatched in patristic exegesis, and that reading dominated Christian exegesis without serious rival until the Reformation era raised alternatives. As for the third leg, the Church agrees that grace is no mechanism: Baptism saves not as plumbing but as the divinely appointed meeting place of faith and gift, and God has bound salvation to the sacrament while remaining unbound by it (CCC 1257). Believing and being baptized are not rivals in this Gospel; they are the inside and the outside of the same birth.

Question 5. Read verse 8 again: the wind blows where it wills. In both Hebrew and Greek, one word means wind, breath, and spirit. What is Jesus conceding about the Spirit's work in this image, and what comfort or discomfort does that bring?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

You hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes. The Spirit's work is real, audible, effective, and not under our administration. You can trim sails to the wind; you cannot schedule it. This comforts anyone tempted to think God only works through their five-step plan, and it discomforts anyone who wanted the five-step plan. Note that this does not undo what was just established about Baptism: God has promised to be found at the font, but He has nowhere promised to be found only there. Promise without confinement: that is the Catholic balance, and verse 8 is where it breathes.

Question 6 (live discovery). Read 3:13-15. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. Send the group to Numbers 21:4-9 and read the whole strange episode. What was killing the people, what was the remedy, and what did a dying person have to do? Now transfer every element: what is Jesus predicting about how he will save?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Fiery serpents were killing the grumbling people; the remedy God commanded was an image of the affliction itself, a bronze serpent, raised on a pole; and the dying were healed not by medicine or merit but by looking at it in obedient faith. Transfer the elements and the blueprint appears: the Son of Man will be lifted up, and everyone who looks to him in faith will live. The Fathers pressed one element further, and Paul is the warrant for it: God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3), and for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). The bronze serpent had the shape of the affliction without its venom; so the sinless Son bore our curse without ever becoming a sinner. John does not spell that out here, so offer it as the reflection it is. Note the verb John chose: lifted up means both hoisted and exalted, enthroned. Start a new line on the tally board: lifted up, first of three sayings. In this Gospel the cross will not be the disgrace Jesus endures before his glory. The lifting up is the glory. The group cannot fully see that yet. They will.

Question 7. Now read 3:16-18, and read verse 16 as if you had never heard it before, connected to the serpent sentence it follows. What exactly did God do because he loved, and what does the word gave carry here? For the leader only if it surfaces: some hear an old echo under only Son; where might it come from?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

God so loved that he gave, and gave here is not gave as in donated but gave as in gave up, handed over, the serpent logic completing itself: the Son must be lifted up, and it is the Father's love that lifts. Condemnation is not the purpose (v. 17); rescue is. If someone hears the old echo, name it with open hands: take your son, your only son, whom you love (Genesis 22:2). Abraham's knife was stayed at the last moment; the Father's was not, because this was not a test of love but the proof of it. The Church has not defined that typology, but the Fathers heard it, and once heard it is difficult to unhear. Isaac carried the wood up the hill himself. So, one day, will someone else.

Question 8. Read 3:19-21. The verdict: light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light. According to these verses, what actually separates the two kinds of people, and what happened to the man who came by night?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Not knowledge, and not even sin as such, but direction of movement: he who does what is true comes to the light. The dividing line runs between those who move toward exposure and those who arrange their lives to avoid it. And the man who came by night is the live demonstration: Nicodemus, for all his caution, moved toward the light with his questions, which is more than most of his council ever did. The Gospel leaves him tonight without a conversion scene, still processing, and that is a mercy to everyone in your group who is also still processing. Keep watching him.

Question 9. Read 3:25-30. The Baptist's disciples are worried: everyone is leaving him for Jesus. Listen to his answer. What image does he reach for, what does he call Jesus, and, connect it to two weeks ago, why should that title make us sit up? Then weigh his final sentence.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He reaches for a wedding: he who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, the best man, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Two sessions ago Jesus quietly did the bridegroom's job at Cana, supplying the wine; now the Baptist says it out loud: Jesus is the bridegroom. In the prophets, the bridegroom of Israel is God Himself (Hosea 2, Isaiah 62). So plant the question and refuse to answer it: if Jesus is the bridegroom, who is the bride? Hold that question all week. And the final sentence: he must increase, but I must decrease. Eight words containing the entire spiritual life. The Baptist's joy is not surviving his own eclipse; his joy is the eclipse, because the whole point of a voice is the Word it carries.

DIG DEEPER

The wind and the bones. If the group has energy, read Ezekiel 37:1-10, the valley of dry bones, and listen for the one word doing three jobs: wind, breath, spirit. Prophecy to the breath... come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain. The wordplay Jesus uses in 3:8 is Ezekiel's

wordplay, and the promise is the same: what is dead does not need a program; it needs the Breath.

Synthesis question. One sentence each: according to this chapter, what must happen to a person, and what has God already done to make it possible?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

You are listening for both halves in the group's own words: a person must be born from above, of water and the Spirit, a beginning they can no more perform on themselves than they performed their first birth; and God has already handed over his only Son, lifted up like the serpent, so that everyone who looks to him in faith may have that life. Grace does the birthing; faith does the looking; the font is where the two were promised to meet. If someone simply says, I cannot do this to myself, and he already did his part, the chapter has landed.

Send

1. He must increase, but I must decrease. Name one specific area of your life where you are still the one increasing. What would decreasing look like there this week?
2. Most of us were baptized before we could remember it. When did your baptism last cross your mind? What would change if you treated it as the day you were actually born from above?

Live It This Week

- **Find your date.** Track down the date of your baptism this week, ask a parent, find the certificate, call the parish. Write it somewhere permanent. You keep the anniversary of your first birth every year; you now have your second one.
- **Bless yourself like you mean it.** Every time you take holy water entering a church this week, slow down. That gesture recalls Ezekiel 36 and your own Baptism: clean water, and a renewed spirit. Let it be a two-second act of remembering who you are.
- **One decrease.** Choose one habit of self-promotion, steering conversations to yourself, checking who noticed, quietly keeping score, and fast from it for seven days, in honor of the friend of the bridegroom.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Father, you so loved the world that you gave your only Son. We were bitten long ago and we know it; teach us to keep looking at the One lifted up for us. Renew in us the grace of our baptism, the clean water and the new spirit you promised through Ezekiel and poured out on us at the font. And give us the best man's joy: he must increase, we must decrease. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 4, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 2:25 and 3:1-2** · the hinge, he knew what was in man, now there was a man; Nicodemus by night
- **John 3:3-8** · born anōthen, born of water and the Spirit, the wind blows where it wills
- **Ezekiel 36:25-27** · live discovery, clean water and a new spirit
- **John 3:10** · are you a teacher of Israel, the rebuke that locates the answer in the Old Testament
- **John 1:26-33 and 3:22** · steelman press, the baptismal context surrounding the discourse
- **John 3:13-15** · as Moses lifted up the serpent; the lifted up thread begins
- **Numbers 21:4-9** · live discovery, the bronze serpent
- **John 8:28 and 12:32-34** · leader reference only, the second and third lifted up sayings; do not read in session
- **John 3:16-18** · God so loved, gave as handed over, rescue not condemnation
- **Genesis 22:2** · leader background, your only son whom you love; hedged typology
- **John 3:19-21** · the verdict, men loved darkness, he who does what is true comes to the light
- **John 3:25-30** · the friend of the bridegroom, he must increase
- **Hosea 2:19-20 and Isaiah 62:5** · leader background, God the bridegroom of His people
- **Ezekiel 37:1-10** · Dig Deeper, the wind, the breath, and the bones
- **John 7:50 and 19:39** · leader reference only, the Nicodemus arc; never reveal in participant materials
- **CCC 458, 1215, 1225, 1257-1261** · Catechism connections

BEHOLD THE LAMB: SESSION 5

Living Water

John 4 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that when the bridegroom of Israel sits down at a well at noon, every Old Testament reader knows a betrothal scene has begun, and that the bride he has come to woo is not a flawless maiden but an estranged, five-times-broken Samaria: God courting back his unfaithful people. Along the way they hear Jesus say I AM for the first time, and they watch a woman with a history everyone knew become the Gospel's first great evangelist.

Catholic Touchstone: The thirst of God and the school of prayer. The Catechism opens its entire teaching on prayer at this well: Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us, and our prayer and his are met there (CCC 2560-2561). He asks her for a drink in order to give her a fountain.

What You Need to Know

John says Jesus had to pass through Samaria (4:4), and the necessity is not geographic; pilgrims routinely crossed the Jordan precisely to avoid Samaria. The Greek *edei*, it was necessary, is John's word for divine necessity: the Son of Man must be lifted up (3:14). Something in the Father's plan runs through Sychar. The enmity between Jews and Samaritans was five centuries deep by this point: the Samaritans were descended from the northern tribes mixed with five foreign peoples settled there by Assyria after 722 BC, each bringing its own gods (2 Kings 17:24-31); they accepted only the Pentateuch, worshiped on Mount Gerizim, and had seen their temple destroyed by a Jewish ruler a century and a half before. Jews traveling through would not share a cup with them. Keep that cup in mind; the scene turns on one.

The staging is a masterpiece of loaded detail. Jacob's well: the patriarch's own ground. The sixth hour, noon: the village women drew together in the cool hours, so a woman at the well at noon is most likely avoiding company; John does not say why, but the detail lands before anyone has mentioned husbands. And note for your own preparation only: the sixth hour returns exactly once more in this Gospel, at 19:14, the hour of the judgment seat; thirst is not named in that verse, but it arrives before the passion scene closes, I thirst (19:28). Say nothing tonight; plant nothing visible; just know the evangelist has set two clocks to the same time. Finally, Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down: this Gospel that opened with the eternal Word shows him tired, hot, and asking a stranger for a drink. True God, and truly wearied, in one verse.

Now the type-scene, and the payoff of the question you planted last week. In the Old Testament, when a man meets a woman at a well, a betrothal follows, again and again: Abraham's servant finds Rebekah at a well (Genesis 24), Jacob meets Rachel at a well at Haran (Genesis 29), Moses meets Zipporah at a well (Exodus 2). A first-century reader hits John 4 and the pattern recognition fires: the man the Baptist just called the bridegroom has sat down at a well. The scene is a betrothal. But John bends the pattern until it breaks the reader's heart: the woman is no maiden. Five husbands, and the current man not her husband. Who then is the bride? Not one woman, but what she embodies: Samaria, the estranged

northern bride, the very people Hosea described as an adulterous wife whom God swore he would nevertheless allure and speak to tenderly and betroth to himself forever (Hosea 2:14-20). Many commentators also hear the five husbands echoing the five foreign peoples Assyria settled in Samaria, each with its own gods (2 Kings 17:24-31); the text does not certify the symbolism, so offer it hedged, but the theological shape is not in doubt: the bridegroom has come to woo back the unfaithful bride, and he opens the courtship by asking her to serve him. God begs a drink from the person everyone else avoids.

The living water dialogue runs on the misunderstanding pattern the group now knows by name: she hears running water, spring water, better plumbing; he means the gift of God, which John will later identify explicitly as the Spirit (7:37-39, leader reference only). Jeremiah supplies the Old Testament voltage: my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13). Five husbands are five broken cisterns. The thirst was never really about water, and Jesus, instead of shaming her, diagnoses her with terrifying gentleness: go, call your husband. He is not exposing her to condemn her; he is naming the wound so the medicine can reach it. Notice what he praises: her honesty. This you said truly.

The worship exchange (4:20-24) is where tonight's steelman lives. She raises the oldest dispute on the books, Gerizim versus Jerusalem, and Jesus answers on two levels at once: salvation is from the Jews, an unambiguous ruling that Israel's God-given cult was the true one and Samaritan worship was deficient (what you do not know); and yet the hour is coming, and now is, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Prepare the press carefully: in John, spirit and truth are not synonyms for sincere and informal. The Spirit is the Holy Spirit, the living water of this very chapter, and the truth, this Gospel will say in so many words, is Jesus himself (14:6). Worship in spirit and truth means worship in the Holy Spirit, through the Son, and the location has not been abolished but relocated: the group traced it themselves, tent, Bethel, the temple of his body. Read that way, wherever that body is, there is the new Gerizim and the new Jerusalem. That step is a Catholic reading of the verse rather than a phrase John supplies, but it rests on ground the Catechism does state: Christ is the true temple of God, and New Covenant worship is not bound to one exclusive place (CCC 1179). A Catholic does not read this verse and abandon liturgy; a Catholic reads this verse and genuflects.

Then the summit: the woman reaches for her deepest hope, I know that Messiah is coming, and Jesus answers with the words that will toll through this Gospel like a bell: *egō eimi*, I am he, literally I AM, the one speaking to you (4:26). It is the first time. The Baptist built his whole testimony out of I am not; here the counter-melody begins, and it begins not before the Sanhedrin or the crowds but for an audience of one discarded woman. Put a new line on the tally board tonight. The thread crescendos in chapter 8 with a sentence that will get stones picked up, and the group must be allowed to arrive there by accumulation.

The ending is all motion: she leaves her water jar, the way the fishermen left their nets in the other Gospels, and runs to the town that knew her story, saying, come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Note her method: no arguments, just come and see, the very words of 1:39 and 1:46, and the testimony of being fully known. Two days later the townspeople say the most expansive title in the Gospel so far: this is indeed the Savior of the world. Not of Israel only; of the world. The estranged bride heard the proposal first. The chapter closes back at Cana with the official's son (4:46-54): Jesus tests him, unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe, the man believes the bare word before seeing anything, and John numbers it for us, the second sign, the last one he will number. The tally is the group's from here on.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Genesis 29:1-11.** Jacob meets Rachel at the well: the betrothal type-scene (set at Haran, far from Samaria; the pattern, not the place, is the point). Central live discovery; Genesis 24 and Exodus 2 complete the pattern verbally.
- **Hosea 2:14-20.** The adulterous bride allured, spoken to tenderly, and betrothed forever in faithfulness. The theological frame of the whole scene. Read aloud by the leader at the payoff moment.
- **Jeremiah 2:13.** The fountain of living waters forsaken for broken cisterns. Live discovery for the living water dialogue.
- **2 Kings 17:24-31.** The five peoples and their gods settled in Samaria. Dig Deeper, offered with hedged language on the five husbands symbolism.
- **Exodus 3:14.** I AM WHO I AM. Leader background for egō eimi; do not deploy fully tonight, the thread must build.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Doctor of the Church, Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 15

Augustine will not let us hurry past the tired man on the well curb: Jesus, wearied from the journey. The strength of Christ created you, he preaches, and the weakness of Christ re-created you. The Word who made the seas sat thirsty beside a well he had made, because our rescue required not only omnipotence but exhaustion. And in the woman Augustine sees a figure of the Church coming from the nations: she arrives with her bucket and her history, and she leaves carrying something no jar can hold.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306-373), Doctor of the Church, Hymns on Virginity

Ephrem sings the detail everyone else steps over: she left her water jar. She came to draw water and abandoned the errand, because, Ephrem says, she had become herself the vessel; she went down to the well a woman carrying a pitcher and came up a fountain carrying Christ to her city. The woman with five husbands behind her became the first herald of the bridegroom to Samaria.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), Doctor of the Church, from her Life

Teresa tells us she was devoted to this Gospel scene from childhood, and that she begged over and over the words of the Samaritan woman: Lord, give me this water. She kept an image of the scene where she could see it, and the prayer stayed with her whole mystical life, which she famously described in figures of water. The greatest teacher of prayer among the Church's women built her interior life on five words first spoken by a five-times-married Samaritan woman.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 2560-2561.** The Catechism opens its teaching on prayer at this well: Jesus thirsts, his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us, and our prayer is the response to the living God's thirst for us.
- **CCC 728.** Jesus begins to reveal the Holy Spirit gradually, alluding to him in speaking to Nicodemus of new birth and to the Samaritan woman of living water.
- **CCC 1179.** New Covenant worship in spirit and truth is not tied to any one exclusive place, because Christ, the true temple of God, is the place of worship, and through him the faithful are living stones of a spiritual house.
- **CCC 439.** Jesus accepted the title Messiah from those who recognized him, though with reserve; to the Samaritan woman he declared it openly.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

The bridegroom and the bride (PAYS OFF tonight). The question planted last week, who is the bride, is answered by the type-scene: the bridegroom sits at a well and the betrothal pattern fires, but the bride is estranged Samaria, the unfaithful people God swore in Hosea to allure back and betroth forever. Name the payoff aloud and let the group feel the study's architecture working. The full ecclesial horizon of the bride waits for the far end of the Gospel; do not overreach tonight.

I AM (NEW, major thread). Egō eimi spoken for the first time at 4:26, to an audience of one. Add the line to the tally board next to the sign count. Recall aloud the Baptist's I am not; the counter-melody has begun. Crescendos in chapter 8. Resolve nothing.

The seven signs tally. Sign 2, the official's son (4:54), numbered by John himself, and it is the last one he numbers. The pen now belongs entirely to the group.

The Hour. A new note tonight: the hour is coming, and now is (4:23), spoken of true worship. Log it on the board with the 2:4 entry. The group should notice the word accumulating meanings; offer no synthesis.

Sign-faith versus real faith. Advances at 4:48: unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe. The official believes the bare word before seeing, the Samaritans believe because of his word (4:41), and the thread is quietly maturing toward a beatitude the group will not hear until the final session.

Living water. Planted tonight; John will name it explicitly as the Spirit at 7:37-39, and something will flow at 19:34. Leader knowledge only.

The sixth hour. Leader knowledge only, never on the board: 4:6 and 19:14 are the only two sixth hours in this Gospel; thirst is spoken at the well itself (4:7) and, some verses past the second sixth hour, on the cross, I thirst (19:28). Treat the pairing as a suggestive literary echo, not as something John states. Session 13 will collect the debt.

Session Goals

1. Participants recognize the well betrothal type-scene from the Old Testament and experience the bridegroom thread paying off.
2. Participants can articulate, from Jeremiah 2:13, what broken cisterns are and where the woman's five stand in the pattern.
3. Participants hear the strongest case that spirit and truth abolishes liturgical worship, and weigh it against what spirit and truth mean in John.
4. Participants register the first egō eimi and open the I AM line on the tally board.
5. Participants can describe the woman's evangelistic method, come and see plus the testimony of being fully known, and log Sign 2.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 20 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: the Dig Deeper on 2 Kings 17 and the five colonist peoples with their gods, the harvest verses in Build question 7 (mention the white fields in one sentence and move on), and the second Win question. Do not cut the Genesis 29 discovery, the Hosea reading, the steelman chain, or the egō eimi moment. If you must choose between finishing the official's son thoroughly and rushing the I AM, log Sign 2 in ninety seconds and give the I AM its silence.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, you sat down tired at a well at noon and asked for a drink from someone everyone else avoided. Sit down with us tonight. You know all that we ever did, and you are not ashamed to ask us for something. Give us the woman's honesty and her courage, and Lord, give us this water. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. When you are running on empty, what do you reach for first, and how long does it actually hold?
2. Has a stranger ever read you accurately within minutes of meeting you? What did that feel like?

Transition: Last week the Baptist called Jesus the bridegroom and left us holding a question: who is the bride? Tonight Jesus sits down at a well. If you know your Old Testament, that sentence alone should make you sit up.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 4:1-9 aloud. Then ask:

Question 1. Inventory the staging: where is this well, what time is it, what condition is Jesus in, and who shows up? What is scandalous about this scene to first-century eyes, and, think about it, why would a woman come to draw water at noon?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Jacob's well, the patriarch's own ground. The sixth hour, noon, the worst hour for hauling water and the best hour for avoiding people: the women of a village drew together in the cool of morning and evening, and a woman alone at noon has good reason to be avoiding the morning crowd, though John leaves the reason unstated. Jesus is wearied, genuinely tired, the eternal Word of chapter 1 hot and thirsty on a well curb. And the scandal is triple: a Jew speaking with a Samaritan (five centuries of hatred, no shared cups), a man alone with a woman, and, as we will learn, this woman. His disciples marvel when they return (4:27). Jesus opens the conversation by putting himself in her debt: give me a drink. God begins the courtship of Samaria by asking to be served.

Question 2 (live discovery). A man, a woman, a well. Send the group to Genesis 29:1-11 and read what happened the last time a traveling bridegroom met a woman at a well. That well is at Haran, far from Samaria; it is the pattern, not the place, that matters here. Then just name the others: Rebekah in Genesis 24, Zipporah in Exodus 2. What kind of scene does the Old Testament tell you is starting? And now, remember what the Baptist called Jesus last week, and look at who is standing at the well. What has John done?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Jacob met Rachel at a well, and a betrothal followed; Abraham's servant found Rebekah at a well, and a betrothal followed; Moses met Zipporah at a well, and a betrothal followed. Three for three: in the Bible, wells are where marriages begin. So when the man just named the bridegroom (3:29) sits

down at a well, every formed reader braces for a betrothal scene. And John gives us one, bent almost past bearing: the woman is five husbands behind her, and the man she now has not her husband. The bride the bridegroom has come for is not a spotless maiden. Leader, now read Hosea 2:14-20 aloud yourself, slowly: God's unfaithful wife, allured into the wilderness, spoken to tenderly, and betrothed again forever. That is who she is, and who Samaria is, and who we are. Last week we asked, who is the bride? Here is the answer this Gospel gives first: the bride is the one who broke faith, and he came for her anyway. Let the room be quiet for a moment after this one.

Question 3 (live discovery). Read 4:10-15. Jesus offers living water; what does she think he means, and what is he actually offering? Send the group to Jeremiah 2:13 and read God's complaint. What are the two evils, and what is a broken cistern?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

She hears spring water, running water, an upgrade in plumbing, and even jokes that he has no bucket: the misunderstanding pattern the group can now name on sight. He means the gift of God, the water that becomes in the drinker a spring welling up to eternal life. Jeremiah names the two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. A cistern is a hole you dig to store stale water that seeps away; a fountain is given, living, and inexhaustible. Every human being runs this experiment: we dig storage for happiness in things that cannot hold it. Ask the group to keep Jeremiah's image in hand; the next verses are about to show us this woman's cisterns, and the count is specific.

Question 4. Read 4:16-19. Go, call your husband. Why does Jesus steer the conversation here, of all places? Is this exposure or something else? And notice the one thing he praises her for.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Because the thirst was never about water, and he cannot heal a wound she will not let him name. Five husbands and a sixth arrangement: five broken cisterns, dug one after another in the same ground, each one seeping dry. He raises it without a syllable of contempt, and watch what he commends: this you said truly... what you have said is true. He praises her honesty twice. The diagnosis is severe and the bedside manner is perfect gentleness, and her response tells us she felt seen rather than condemned: she does not flee, she goes deeper, sir, I perceive that you are a prophet, and asks him the biggest question she has. People run from exposure; people move toward being known. This is the difference, and it is worth pausing to say that the Church has a sacrament built entirely on this difference.

Leader note: John never tells us how the five marriages ended. A woman of that time could be widowed or divorced by a husband but could not divorce one herself, so do not let the group assume guilt the Gospel does not assign. What the text gives us is loss, repetition, and a present arrangement that is not marriage; that is enough for the cistern image without adding a verdict on her character.

Steelman: Does Spirit and Truth Abolish Liturgy?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

Read 4:20-24 first. Then build the case many low-church Protestants make from it, at full strength. The woman asks the oldest liturgical question on record, which holy mountain is the right one, and Jesus seems to dissolve the whole category: neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. God is spirit, and true worship is in spirit and truth. There it is, the argument runs: sacred places, sacred buildings, sacred rituals, vestments, incense, appointed hours, all of it belongs to the era that ended at this well. True worship is interior, sincere, unmediated; the heart is the only temple God wants. And Catholicism, with its altars and liturgies and holy places, has simply rebuilt Gerizim with better architecture, repeating in stone the mistake Jesus corrected in person. The reading is not lazy; the verse really does relativize both mountains, and it really does say God is spirit. Let it stand at full strength. And press it one level further, because the sharpest version of this argument is not anti-ceremonial at all. Its advocates keep baptism, the Lord's Supper, ordered assembly, preaching and appointed times; they cheerfully grant that Israel's worship was God-given and true. Their claim is narrower and harder: Hebrews teaches that the temple, the altar, the sacrifice and the ministerial priesthood were shadows fulfilled once for all in Christ, who offered a single sacrifice and sat down. On that reading Jesus at the well is announcing the end of the temple system, and Catholicism has put the shadow back up: a sanctuary, an altar, a priesthood, a sacrifice offered again and again. Note that salvation is from the Jews does not touch this version of the argument. It concedes it.

Question 5 (press from the text). Four probes. First: in the middle of relativizing the mountains, Jesus hands down a ruling, you worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. What does that ruling do to the idea that he is against God-given ritual as such? Second: in this Gospel, what is the Spirit (this very chapter has been telling us), and what is the truth (the group will one day hear Jesus define it in one sentence)? Third: recall the thread on our board, tent, Bethel, temple of his body. Has worship lost its place, or changed its address? Fourth: if the objection is not against ceremony but against restoring what Hebrews says is finished, what exactly does the Church claim is happening at the altar?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

First probe: a man abolishing ritual religion does not pause to rule that one ritual system was the true one. Salvation is from the Jews affirms Israel's God-given cult, temple, feasts, priesthood and all, against Samaria's truncated version; whatever spirit and truth means, it cannot mean the cult God himself commanded was the problem. Second: in John, spirit and truth are not moods. The Spirit is the Holy Spirit, the living water of this chapter (John will say so outright at 7:39), and the truth, Jesus will say in so many words, is himself: I am the way, and the truth, and the life (14:6). Worship in spirit and truth is worship in the Holy Spirit, through the Son, which is not a description of informality. Catholics find it realized in the Mass, whose every prayer ascends to the Father, through Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit; John does not name the Mass, but he does give the two terms, and Catholic worship is built out of exactly those two. Third: the group's own thread answers the geography. Worship was not de-located into vapor; it was re-located into a body, the temple of his body (2:21). Neither Gerizim nor Jerusalem, because wherever that body is, there the true mountain is. The hour is coming, and now is: it began arriving when the temple began walking around Samaria. A Catholic reads this verse and does not put away the liturgy; a Catholic reads this verse and understands at last why we genuflect toward the tabernacle. Fourth probe: the Church does not claim a new sacrifice or a repeated one. Hebrews ends the repetition of sacrifices, and Catholic teaching says the same: the Mass offers no second offering but makes present the one

offering of Calvary, and the priest acts in the person of the one High Priest, whose priesthood is not replaced but sacramentally extended. So the altar is not Gerizim rebuilt, because Gerizim and Jerusalem were places where a sacrifice still had to be made; the Catholic altar is where the finished sacrifice is given to us. And that is the answer to the geography question too: the location moved into the body of Christ, and the Eucharist is where that body is. The stronger argument and the Catholic answer agree that the shadow is over. They disagree about whether the fulfillment is something you can kneel in front of.

Question 6. Read 4:25-26. She reaches for her deepest hope: I know that Messiah is coming. Listen very carefully to the exact words of the reply, because a thread longer than this chapter begins here. What does Jesus literally say, and, think back to Session 2, whose way of speaking does it reverse?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

I who speak to you am he, and the underlying Greek is two words with a long shadow: egō eimi, I AM. It is the first time Jesus says it in this Gospel. Recall the Baptist under interrogation: I am not the Christ, I am not, no, a whole testimony built of denials, and we said the counter-melody would come. It has begun, and notice the audience: not the Sanhedrin, not a packed synagogue, but one Samaritan woman with five broken cisterns, at noon, alone. The most direct self-declaration Jesus has made so far in this Gospel was entrusted first to her. Open a new line on the tally board: I AM, first occurrence, 4:26. The group should track every one from here forward. Where the phrase ultimately reaches, and why it will one day cause a riot, is exactly what the tally is for. Say no more tonight.

Question 7. Read 4:27-30 and 39-42. Watch her exit closely: what does she leave behind, what does she say to the town, and what do the townspeople end up calling Jesus? Where have we heard her method before?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

She leaves her water jar, the errand she came for abandoned like nets on a beach, and runs back to the town whose company she had been avoiding at noon. Her message has no arguments in it: come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. It is the Gospel's own method, come and see (1:39, 1:46), plus the one credential nobody can refute: the testimony of being fully known and not destroyed by it. What she could not say becomes her sermon. And it works: many Samaritans believed because of the woman's testimony, then two days later because they heard him themselves, and the town of half-breeds and heretics coins the widest title in the Gospel so far: this is indeed the Savior of the world. Not of Judea, not of Israel: the world. The estranged bride was the first to hear the proposal, and the first to publish the banns.

Question 8. Read 4:46-54. Back at Cana, an official begs for his dying son, and Jesus answers strangely: unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe. Watch what the man does with a bare sentence and no evidence. And note the last verse carefully: what does John call this healing, and what number does he give it?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The man is not deflected: he believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way, twenty miles home on nothing but a sentence, and only afterward learns the fever broke at that very hour. This is the thread maturing: the crowd wants signs and wonders as a precondition, but the official believes before seeing, on the strength of the word alone, and the Samaritans just did the same, believing because of his word (4:41). Log it: this was now the second sign (4:54), and it is the last sign John will number. From here the pen is entirely in the group's hand. Two down. The hunt is on.

DIG DEEPER

Five husbands, five foreign peoples? If the group has energy, read 2 Kings 17:24-31: after Assyria emptied the north, five peoples were settled in Samaria, and each made gods of its own even while half-fearing the LORD. Many readers ancient and modern have heard those five settled peoples and their cults under the woman's five husbands, with the current man who is not a husband as Samaria's compromised half-worship of the LORD. The text never certifies the allegory, so hold it lightly, but notice how perfectly the personal and the national stories rhyme: a bride who kept giving herself to what could not keep covenant with her, met at a well by the Husband who can.

Synthesis question. One sentence each: the scene opened with Jesus asking her for a drink. By the end of the chapter, what was he actually thirsty for?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Her. Her faith, her honesty, her return, her whole broken history handed over. The Catechism opens its entire teaching on prayer at this well: Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us (CCC 2560). He asked for a drink in order to give a fountain, and the pattern holds for everyone in the room: every time God asks something of us, it is the opening move of a gift. If someone says, he wanted her more than she wanted him, the session has landed, and the leader may quietly note that the Gospel is not finished with the theme of Jesus' thirst.

Send

1. Name your cistern: the one place you keep going back to draw from, that keeps not holding water. What would it mean to bring your bucket to the well instead this week?
2. Her whole testimony was one sentence: he told me all that I ever did. If you had to give your testimony in one sentence, no theology, just what he did, what would it be?

Live It This Week

- **Pray Teresa's prayer.** Every day this week, begin your prayer with the woman's five words, the ones St. Teresa of Ávila begged from childhood: Lord, give me this water. Then be quiet for two minutes and let him answer.
- **Let him tell you all you ever did.** Jesus named her whole story and she felt loved, not condemned, and she moved toward him. Consider going to Confession this week: the sacrament where being fully known and being shown mercy happen in the same sentence.

- **One sentence to one person.** Her method is available to you: no arguments, just testimony and an invitation. Give your one-sentence testimony from the Send question to one actual person this week.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, bridegroom of the unfaithful bride, you had to pass through Samaria, and we believe you have to pass through here too. You know all that we ever did, and still you sit down at our well and ask. Here are our cisterns, cracked and familiar; trade us the fountain. Give us honest hearts, and the woman's running feet, and the water welling up to eternal life. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 4:14

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 5, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 4:1-9** · opening reading, had to pass through Samaria, Jacob's well, the sixth hour, give me a drink
- **Genesis 29:1-11** · live discovery, Jacob and Rachel at the well; the betrothal type-scene
- **Genesis 24 and Exodus 2:15-21** · named verbally, Rebekah and Zipporah complete the pattern
- **Hosea 2:14-20** · read aloud by the leader, the unfaithful bride allured and betrothed forever
- **John 4:10-15** · living water, the misunderstanding, the spring welling up
- **Jeremiah 2:13** · live discovery, the fountain forsaken and the broken cisterns
- **John 4:16-19** · go, call your husband; the five; her honesty praised
- **John 4:20-24** · steelman text, Gerizim versus Jerusalem, spirit and truth, salvation is from the Jews
- **John 14:6 and 7:37-39** · leader references for the press, the truth is a person and the water is the Spirit; do not read in session
- **John 4:25-26** · egō eimi, the first I AM, spoken to an audience of one
- **Exodus 3:14** · leader background only, I AM WHO I AM; the thread must build before this is deployed
- **John 4:27-30 and 39-42** · the abandoned jar, come see a man, Savior of the world
- **John 4:46-54** · the official's son, believing the bare word, the second sign, last one John numbers
- **2 Kings 17:24-31** · Dig Deeper, the five peoples and their gods; hedged symbolism
- **CCC 439, 728, 1179, 2560-2561** · Catechism connections

The Son's Authority

John 5: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that one sabbath healing detonates the Gospel's central controversy: Jesus claims to do what God alone does, his enemies understand him perfectly, and the first plot to kill him begins. They then watch Jesus conduct a formal trial in his own defense, summoning four witnesses, and they test the most quoted verse in the sola scriptura debate inside its actual context.

Catholic Touchstone: The divinity of Christ, claimed in his own words and understood by his first hearers. This is what is at stake in every honor paid to Jesus in the liturgy: that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father (5:23). And in the fourfold witness, the Catholic instinct that God testifies through a communion of witnesses, never through a text left to fend for itself.

What You Need to Know

The scene opens at the pool called Bethesda, by the Sheep Gate, which John describes as having five porticoes (5:2). For centuries skeptics counted this detail against John, since no five-sided pool was known, until excavations north of the temple mount uncovered exactly what he described: twin pools with four surrounding colonnades and a fifth across the dividing barrier between them. The detail fits an author familiar with pre-70 Jerusalem. Share this with the group; it is a small, honest brick in the wall of confidence that this Gospel rests on eyewitness memory (19:35, 21:24).

One man in the crowd of invalids has been ill for thirty eight years, and John's numbers have earned our attention by now. Deuteronomy 2:14 records that Israel's wandering from Kadesh-barnea, where the faithless generation refused to enter the land, until the crossing of the brook Zered, lasted exactly thirty eight years: the years of the paralyzed generation, dying by inches within sight of promise. John never cites Deuteronomy, so hold this as a resonance the Gospel invites rather than a connection John states; read that way, the man at Bethesda images that Israel: immobilized for thirty eight years beside water that had not healed him, waiting for a stirring that never comes for him. Let the group find Deuteronomy themselves; the click is worth it. A textual note you should have ready: verse 4, about an angel troubling the water, is missing from the earliest manuscripts and is footnoted or bracketed in the RSV2CE; it appears to be an early gloss explaining the superstition of verse 7. Nothing hangs on it, and Jesus conspicuously bypasses the pool altogether: he heals with a bare word, no water, no touch, no stirring.

Do you want to be healed? sounds like the least necessary question in the Gospels, and it is one of the most penetrating. Listen to the man's answer: he does not say yes. He gives the well-worn explanation, sir, I have no man to put me into the pool, an excuse polished by thirty eight years of use. Illness can become an identity; a wound can become a way of life. John never tells us why Jesus asks, so offer this as pastoral reflection rather than exegesis: the question addresses a will, and grace ordinarily calls for a free response rather than overriding one. Keep the honest tension in view as well; the man never actually says yes, and Jesus heals him anyway. Here grace goes first and asks afterward. Handle this

pastorally, not accusingly; everyone in your group is somewhere in year eleven or twenty three beside some pool of their own.

The healed man carries his pallet, and the authorities see only a sabbath violation: it is not lawful for you to carry your pallet. Thirty eight years have ended and their entire attention is on a mat. When they trace the healing to Jesus, his defense detonates everything: my Father is working still, and I am working (5:17). To feel the force, know the background: Jewish teachers came to articulate, in traditions later codified, that God Himself does not stop working on the sabbath, since the universe does not fly apart on Saturdays; He sustains creation, gives life, and judges the dying, works permitted to God alone. Jesus' sentence claims exactly that exemption: as my Father works through the sabbath, so do I. John 5:18 records that his hearers understood him instantly and precisely: he called God his own Father, making himself equal with God, and this was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him. Underline this for your group's apologetics toolkit: the claim of divinity is not a later invention read back into Jesus; his first and most hostile hearers heard it on the spot, and the death plot that ends at the cross begins here, at a mat, on a sabbath.

The discourse that follows (5:19-29) is the Gospel's deepest early teaching on the Father and the Son, and it must be read with both hands. One hand: the Son can do nothing of his own accord, he does only what he sees the Father doing, everything is received. The other hand: whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise, the Son gives life to whom he will, all judgment is given to the Son, and all must honor the Son even as they honor the Father. No creature could survive that second list. The resolution is the Church's Trinitarian faith: the Son is eternally from the Father, and his from-ness is not inferiority but relation; he receives everything, and what he receives is everything, the whole divine life and work. Teach it calmly; this chapter is where Nicaea learned its grammar. Note also the two hours of the discourse: the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God (5:25, the spiritually dead, now), and the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice (5:28, the bodily dead, at the end). Eternal life in John is not only a future possession; whoever hears and believes has passed from death to life, present tense (5:24). And the general resurrection is of all, some to the resurrection of life, some to the resurrection of judgment (5:29; CCC 998).

The chapter closes as a courtroom (5:30-47). Jewish law required two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15), and Jesus, declining to testify alone, calls four: the Baptist, the burning and shining lamp; the works the Father has given him; the Father Himself; and the Scriptures, with Moses as the accusing counsel: if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me (5:46). Inside this courtroom sits the verse your steelman is built on: you search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life (5:39-40). Prepare it carefully and charitably; it is one of the most quoted verses in the Catholic-Protestant conversation, and tonight the group reads it where it lives.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Deuteronomy 2:14.** Thirty eight years from Kadesh-barnea to the brook Zered, until the faithless generation had perished. The number the group will hear under the man at Bethesda. Central live discovery.
- **Genesis 2:2-3.** God rested on the seventh day, and yet the world is sustained through every sabbath. The background of my Father is working still. Leader background.
- **Deuteronomy 19:15.** On the evidence of two or three witnesses. The legal frame of the fourfold witness. Quick verbal reference or lookup.

- **Deuteronomy 18:15-19.** The prophet like Moses, to whom you shall listen. One concrete answer to where Moses wrote of me, alongside everything the group has already discovered.
- **Ezekiel 47:1-9.** The river of healing water flowing from the temple. Dig Deeper: the pool that could not heal versus the living water from the true temple.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Doctor of the Church, Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 17

Augustine puzzles lovingly over the number thirty eight. Forty, he observes, is Scripture's number of completeness in the law, and thirty eight falls short of it by exactly two. What two things did the man lack? The twofold command on which everything hangs: love of God and love of neighbor. The law without charity leaves a man two short of forty, paralyzed beside the law's own pool, unable to reach what he can see. Only when Love himself walks up and speaks does the man finally stand.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376-444), Doctor of the Church, Commentary on the Gospel of John, on chapter 5

Cyril, the great defender of Christ's full divinity, presses on 5:23: that all may honor the Son even as they honor the Father. Equal honor, he argues, is intelligible only between equals in nature; God, who says through Isaiah that He gives His glory to no other, could not command for a creature the very honor owed to Himself. Either the Son shares the Father's nature, or heaven has commanded idolatry. The verse leaves no third room, and the Church's worship of Jesus has stood on it ever since.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Doctor of the Church, Commentary on the Gospel of John, on chapter 5

Aquinas holds the discourse's two hands together. That the Son does nothing of himself does not diminish him, Aquinas explains, for the Son receives from the Father the very same nature, power, and operation, whole and undivided; his receiving is his eternal begottenness, not a creature's dependence. Whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise: one power, one work, two persons. Everything is gift, and the gift is everything.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 589.** Jesus gave scandal above all by identifying his own conduct with God's; his hearers saw in his claims a man making himself God, and either he spoke truly or he blasphemed. The middle ground was never offered.
- **CCC 679.** Christ is Lord of eternal life, and the Father has given all judgment to the Son, citing this chapter directly.
- **CCC 998.** All the dead will rise, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment, quoting John 5:29.
- **CCC 2173.** Jesus and the sabbath: he never fails to respect its holiness while giving its authentic interpretation, for the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

The seven signs tally. Sign 3 by the traditional count: the healing at Bethesda. This is the first sign the group logs without John numbering it for them; make a small ceremony of the pen passing. Expect and welcome debate about whether it counts; the arguing is the learning.

The death plot (NEW). They sought all the more to kill him (5:18). Open a tension line on the board. The plot will strain against a strange restraint in the coming chapters, and the group will eventually discover what the restraint is called. Say nothing beyond logging it.

The Hour. Two more entries tonight: 5:25, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and 5:28, the hour is coming when all in the tombs will hear it. The board now holds the Hour of the wedding, of worship, and of the dead. Offer no synthesis; the accumulation is the point.

Sign-faith versus real faith. A strange data point: the healed man never expresses faith, does not know who healed him, and reports Jesus to the authorities. Not every touched life turns to belief. Let the group sit with the ambiguity.

Moses wrote of me. Meta-thread moment: the group has already found Genesis 1, Genesis 28, and Numbers 21 with their own hands, and the Passover calendar is quietly running in the background. When 5:46 lands, invite them to name what Moses has shown them so far. The sealed guesses gain interest again; say nothing.

Session Goals

1. Participants discover Deuteronomy 2:14 and can articulate what thirty eight years by unavailing water signifies.
2. Participants wrestle personally with do you want to be healed and can name the anatomy of a polished excuse.
3. Participants can explain why my Father is working still is a divine claim, and that Jesus' hostile hearers understood it immediately (5:18).
4. Participants can hold both hands of the discourse: the Son receives everything, and what he receives is everything, equal honor included.
5. Participants hear the strongest sola scriptura case from 5:39 and weigh it inside the verse's own courtroom.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 20 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: the Dig Deeper on Ezekiel 47, the archaeology note in Build question 1 (compress to one sentence), and Build question 7 on the two hours (log the Hour entries on the board without full discussion). Do not cut the Deuteronomy 2:14 discovery, the 5:17-18 exchange, or the steelman chain. Next week is the Bread of Life; end on time and tell them to come rested.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, you walked into a crowd of the sick and asked one man the question you ask everyone: do you want to be healed? Ask us tonight, and do not accept our polished excuses. You are working still, with the Father, even now, even here. Speak the word, and we shall be healed. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. What is the longest you have ever waited for something? Did the waiting change you, and how?
2. Do you want to be healed? sounds like a pointless question. When, honestly, is it not?

Transition: Tonight one healing on one sabbath starts the argument that runs to the end of this Gospel, and the first plot against Jesus' life. Watch how much detonates from one man picking up a mat.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 5:1-9 aloud. Then ask:

Question 1. Inventory the scene: where is this pool, what surrounds it, who fills it, and how long has our man been there? One outside note worth having: for centuries skeptics doubted John's five porticoes, until archaeologists uncovered the twin pools north of the temple mount with exactly that colonnade structure. What does the pile of detail suggest about the writer?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Bethesda, by the Sheep Gate, five porticoes, a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed, and one man thirty eight years ill. The excavated pools matching John's description are a quiet confidence-builder: this Gospel keeps checking out on the ground, because it claims to rest on a man who was there (19:35). And note the grim scenery John paints without comment: a crowd of the desperate, gathered around water they believe in, and in the whole scene John never once shows that water healing anyone. Keep that image; the chapter is going to replace it.

Question 2 (live discovery). Thirty eight years. By now this Gospel has taught us to check its numbers. Send the group to Deuteronomy 2:14 and read it. Who else spent exactly thirty eight years stuck, and why? What does that make the man at the pool?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Israel: thirty eight years from Kadesh-barnea, where the faithless generation refused to enter the land, to the crossing of the brook Zered, until that entire generation of men of war had perished, dying by inches within sight of promise. Read that way, the man images paralyzed Israel in one body: immobilized for a generation's span beside water that cannot actually save, waiting for a stirring that never comes for him. Everything about the scene preaches the condition Jesus has come to end: a pool of waiting, real hope, no power yet. And into it walks the one the water was always pointing to.

Question 3. Jesus asks: do you want to be healed? Read the man's answer in verse 7 with complete honesty. Is it a yes? What is it? And then watch verses 8 and 9: what does the healing require, and what does it conspicuously not involve?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

It is not a yes. It is an explanation, thirty eight years polished: sir, I have no man to put me into the pool; while I am going another steps down before me. The excuse has become the identity; he has a system, a grievance, and a spot in the shade. John does not say why Jesus asks, but the question is worth sitting with: it is put to a will, and after thirty eight years a man can prefer the familiar pool to the terrifying possibility of standing. Notice too that the man never gives the yes, and Jesus heals him regardless; the question searches him, it does not gate the mercy. The healing itself bypasses the whole apparatus: no water, no stirring, no helper, just the word: rise, take up your pallet, and walk. The pool was never the point. Be gentle here, because every person in the room, the leader included, has a pool, a spot, and a speech.

Question 4. Read 5:10-16. A man who could not move for thirty eight years is walking, and what do the authorities notice? What do they ask him, and what do they never ask him? What has gone wrong with their seeing?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

They see a mat being carried on the sabbath. It is not lawful for you to carry your pallet: the entire miracle is invisible to them; the infraction fills the screen. They ask who told you to carry it, and never, who healed you, how do you feel, blessed be God. In these men, on this day, concern for the rule has crowded out any room for wonder. John gives us their one question and their telling silence, and lets us draw the inference; the point is what these particular officials did with this particular miracle, not a verdict on keeping God's law. And the healed man himself is an uncomfortable mirror: he does not know who healed him, expresses no gratitude we are shown, and when he finds out, reports Jesus to the authorities. Log it on the sign-faith line: not every touched life turns to faith. The chapter refuses to sentimentalize. A word for the leader before this lands: the target here is these particular officials and what they did with this particular miracle, never Jewish observance as such. The sabbath, the law, and the Scriptures are God's own gifts, Jesus keeps them, and the Church honors them; what John indicts is a use of them that could look straight at a healed man and see only a mat.

Question 5. Read 5:17-18 slowly; this is the hinge of the chapter and one of the hinges of the Gospel. Jesus' defense is one sentence: my Father is working still, and I am working. Background you need: Jewish teachers came to articulate, in traditions later written down, that God Himself works through every sabbath, since the world does not fall apart on Saturdays; He sustains creation, gives life, and judges the dying, works belonging to God alone. The developed formulations we can read are later than this scene, but the underlying instinct is clearly in the air here, because Jesus' hearers react to his sentence instantly and correctly. Given that, what is Jesus claiming? And look hard at verse 18: what do his enemies hear, and how do we know they heard correctly?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He is claiming God's own sabbath exemption: the works that continue on the seventh day are the

works no creature may claim, and I am doing them, with my Father. Verse 18 records the instant, accurate decoding: he called God his own Father, making himself equal with God, and for this they sought all the more to kill him. Notice what John does not say: he does not say they misunderstood. Everywhere else the misunderstanding pattern runs, John corrects it; here the hostile reading stands, because it is the right reading. File this in your apologetics kit: the claim of divinity is not something councils invented centuries later; the first hostile audience heard it on a sabbath afternoon, and the plot that ends at Calvary began that hour. Open the death plot line on the board.

Question 6. Read 5:19-23. Hold the discourse with both hands. Hand one: the Son can do nothing of his own accord. Hand two: whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise... the Son gives life to whom he will... all judgment is given to the Son... that all may honor the Son even as they honor the Father. Could any creature say the second list? And what does the first list mean, if not inferiority?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

No creature can do whatever the Father does, no creature gives life to whom he will, and no creature may receive the honor due to the Father; God says through Isaiah that He gives His glory to no other. So hand two rules out any reading of hand one as inferiority. The resolution is the faith of Nicaea, and this chapter is where it learned to talk: the Son is eternally from the Father, and his from-ness is relation, not rank. He receives everything, and what he receives is everything, the whole divine nature, power, and work. Everything is gift, and the gift is entire. When your group bows at the name of Jesus or genuflects before the tabernacle, verse 23 is the charter: honoring the Son as the Father is not idolatry; refusing to would be disobedience.

Question 7. Read 5:24-29. Two announcements about hours. What has already happened, present tense, to the one who hears and believes (v. 24-25)? And what is still coming, for absolutely everyone (v. 28-29)? Log both on the Hour line.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Present tense: whoever hears and believes has eternal life, has passed from death to life, already; the hour now is when the spiritually dead hear the voice of the Son of God and live. Eternal life in John is not a ticket for later; it is a life that begins at faith and Baptism and is meant to be lived now. Still coming: the hour when all who are in the tombs, all, hear his voice and come out, some to the resurrection of life, some to the resurrection of judgment (CCC 998). The board now carries the Hour of the wedding, the Hour of worship, and the Hour of the dead. Do not synthesize; just let the group notice the word gathering weight.

Steelman: You Search the Scriptures

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

Read 5:39-40 first, then build the case with real respect, because it is a serious one. Here, the Protestant reader says, is Jesus' own doctrine of authority. He is in a dispute with the religious hierarchy of his day, and where does he direct the argument? To the Scriptures: it is they that bear witness to me. He does not appeal to the traditions of the elders; elsewhere he attacks those traditions for voiding the word of God. He treats the written word as the standing, sufficient, public

witness, available to anyone who will search it, if need be over the heads of the official teachers, whose real but fallible ministry the classic Reformers themselves affirmed. Moses will accuse them, not the magisterium of their day, which got it wrong while the text got it right. The Bereans of Acts 17 were called noble for exactly this searching. So, the argument concludes, the final court of appeal is Scripture itself, and every human teaching office, Catholic ones included, stands under it and can err beneath it. State it at full strength; much of it a Catholic can and should simply grant.

Question 8 (press from the text). Begin by granting what is true: Scripture's witness is real, public, and authoritative, and Jesus wields it against the official teachers of his day. Now look at the verse in its own courtroom. First: is 5:39 a commendation or a rebuke, and what is the actual outcome of these men's tireless searching? Second: count the witnesses Jesus calls in this chapter. Does he summon Scripture alone? Third: the most Scripture-saturated men in Israel stood in front of the one the text pointed to and missed him. What does that tell us about what the text, by itself, can and cannot do?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

First: the verse reads as a rebuke (indicative or imperative, scholars debate the grammar; verse 40 settles the charge: you refuse to come to me). You search the Scriptures, diligently, professionally, because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness to me, yet you refuse to come to me. Their searching was tireless and their conclusion was fatal; the searching, by itself, saved no one in the room. Second: Jesus calls a communion of witnesses, four of them, the Baptist, the works, the Father, and the Scriptures with Moses as counsel, in careful compliance with Deuteronomy's two-or-three rule. He does not isolate the text as a lone and self-sufficient arbiter even while honoring it as true; the witness of Scripture stands inside a chorus. Third, and gently: the lesson of the Pharisees is not that Scripture fails, for it is they that bear witness to me is Jesus' own verdict on its perfect reliability. The lesson is that the text does not interpret itself into a heart; it must be read toward the person it points to, and read within the living witness God has provided. The Ethiopian official said it for all of us: how can I, unless some one guides me? (Acts 8:31), and God's answer was not a better concordance but Philip, the Church's ordained evangelist, sent by God's angel and Spirit. Catholics do not set the Church over the Scriptures; we receive the Scriptures inside the same living communion of witnesses through which God gave them, so that the searching ends where verse 40 says it must: not in mastery of the text, but in coming to him.

Question 9. Read 5:45-47. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. Put the group on the spot, in the best way: in five sessions, where have we already caught Moses writing of him, with our own hands on the pages?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Let them build the list themselves: Genesis 1, in the beginning, creation by the Word; Genesis 28, the ladder at Bethel that Jesus claimed to be; Numbers 21, the serpent lifted on the pole, his own blueprint for the cross; and Deuteronomy 18, the prophet like Moses to whom Israel must listen, if the group recalls it from the Baptist's interrogation. Add tonight: Deuteronomy 2:14 and the thirty eight years. Moses has been testifying all study, and the group has been the ones discovering it, which is exactly the design. One more of Moses' books has been humming in the background since a certain feast was named in chapter 2. Say nothing further; the seal holds.

DIG DEEPER

The water that actually heals. If the group has energy, read Ezekiel 47:1-9: the river flowing from the temple, deepening from ankles to knees to an uncrossable flood, and everything shall live where the river goes. Bethesda was a pool that, in John's telling, healed no one we meet; Ezekiel promised water from the temple that heals everything it touches. The group already knows where the true temple is (2:21). One day in this Gospel, something will flow from it. Leave the sentence exactly there.

Synthesis question. This whole chapter is a trial. Who is officially on trial, who ends up actually on trial, and what verdict question does the chapter leave sitting in front of every reader?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Officially, Jesus is on trial for sabbath-breaking and blasphemy. By the end, the court has been quietly reversed: the accusers stand accused by Moses, their own counsel, and the reader is left holding the only question that matters. Jesus claimed God's own works, God's own honor, and his enemies understood him perfectly; the middle ground, a nice teacher who claimed nothing much, was never on offer (CCC 589). Either he blasphemed, or every knee should bow. The chapter does not let us adjourn.

Send

1. I have no man is the sound of an excuse that has become an identity. Where in your life has the explanation gotten more polished than the desire to be healed?
2. Thirty eight years beside water that cannot heal. What pool are you camped beside, the thing you keep waiting on that has never once stirred for you, and what would rise, take up your pallet, and walk mean this week?

Live It This Week

- **Answer the question.** In prayer this week, let Jesus ask you directly, about one specific area you name: do you want to be healed? Answer him honestly, yes, no, or not yet, and tell him why. He can work with honesty; he waits out excuses.
- **Keep an hour of sabbath.** The Lord of the sabbath healed on it because the sabbath was made for restoration. Claim one deliberate hour this Sunday, no screens, no errands, for rest and worship, and let the Father who is working still do the working.
- **Search with the Church.** Take one of tonight's Catechism paragraphs (589, 679, 998, or 2173), look it up, and read it next to the verses it cites. Ten minutes of Scripture read inside the Church's living witness: the searching that ends in coming to him.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, Son of the Father, you do whatever the Father does, and the Father is working still. Work on us. We confess the pools we camp beside and the excuses we have polished smooth; ask us your question until we answer it. Let Moses and all the Scriptures do in us what they

were written to do: bring us to you, that we may have life. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 5:24

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 6, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 5:1-9** · opening reading, Bethesda, five porticoes, thirty eight years, rise and walk; note the verse 4 textual footnote in the RSV2CE
- **Deuteronomy 2:14** · live discovery, the thirty eight years of the faithless generation
- **John 5:10-16** · the mat, the authorities' blindness, the healed man's report
- **John 5:17-18** · my Father is working still; equal with God; the death plot begins
- **Genesis 2:2-3** · leader background, the sabbath rest and the sustaining God
- **John 5:19-23** · the two hands of the discourse; equal honor (v. 23)
- **John 5:24-29** · passed from death to life; the two hours; the general resurrection
- **John 5:30-38** · the witnesses: the Baptist, the works, the Father
- **Deuteronomy 19:15** · quick reference, two or three witnesses
- **John 5:39-40** · steelman text, you search the Scriptures, yet you refuse to come to me
- **Acts 8:31 and Acts 17:11** · press references, the eunuch's question and the Bereans; cite verbally
- **John 5:45-47** · Moses wrote of me; the group builds the list they have already discovered
- **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** · the prophet like Moses, one concrete answer to 5:46
- **Ezekiel 47:1-9** · Dig Deeper, the healing river from the temple
- **CCC 589, 679, 998, 2173** · Catechism connections

BEHOLD THE LAMB: SESSION 7

The Bread of Life

John 6: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that John 6 moves in two movements, from bread received by faith to flesh given as food, and that at the exact moment the crowd asks how can this man give us his flesh to eat, Jesus breaks his own lifelong pattern: instead of correcting the literal reading, he intensifies it, swears to it, coarsens the verb, and lets disciples walk away over it. They finish the night standing where the Twelve stood, holding Peter's answer: Lord, to whom shall we go?

Catholic Touchstone: The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, true, real, and substantial (CCC 1374), and the Mass as the source and summit of the Christian life (CCC 1324). Tonight is why this study exists. Everything the group has traced, the tent, the temple of his body, the wedding wine, the living water, converges on an altar.

What You Need to Know

Begin with the timestamp, because John placed it like a signature: now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand (6:4). Nothing in the narrative requires the note; the feeding happens in Galilee, nowhere near Jerusalem. John dates the entire chapter to Passover because the discourse it contains is Passover theology, bread, flesh, blood, and a death for the life of the world. This is the second of the Gospel's three Passovers, and your sealed guesses are compounding interest tonight at a furious rate. One key you must carry alone until Session 13: the Passover lamb of Exodus 12 was not only slain. The command was, they shall eat the flesh (Exodus 12:8). A Passover sacrifice you did not eat was a Passover you did not keep. Say nothing; but understand why John put this discourse at this feast.

The feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15) is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels, and John's telling drips with liturgical vocabulary: Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, *eucharistēsas*, he distributed them (6:11); afterward the fragments, *klasmata*, are gathered up that nothing may be lost, and *klasmata* is the very word the earliest Christians used for the Eucharistic fragments in their liturgies. The barley loaves point backward too: Elisha once fed a hundred men with twenty barley loaves, with the promise they shall eat and have some left (2 Kings 4:42-44), a live discovery your group will enjoy, and Jesus outruns the prophet by orders of magnitude: five loaves, five thousand men, twelve baskets over. The crowd draws the right conclusion with the wrong ambition: this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world, Deuteronomy 18 again, and they move to make him king by force. He withdraws alone. He has not come to be that kind of king, and the difference between the kingship they want and the kingship he brings is, in a sense, the whole chapter.

The sea crossing (6:16-21) is brief and enormous. In the dark, against the wind, the disciples see Jesus walking on the sea, and his word to them is *egō eimi*, it is I, I AM, do not be afraid. Job says of God that He alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea (Job 9:8), and the psalmist sings to God, thy way was through the sea... yet thy footprints were unseen (Psalm 77:19). Someone's

footprints have now been seen. The I AM line on your board takes its second entry, and this one is spoken from on top of the water. Log Signs 4 and 5 in one night.

The discourse (6:22-58) is best taught in its two movements, the division Catholic tradition hears at verse 51, and the honesty of tonight's steelman depends on your keeping them distinct. Movement one, 6:26-50: the crowd that ate wants breakfast again (you seek me... because you ate your fill of the loaves, the sign-faith thread at its bluntest), demands manna credentials, and Jesus declares, I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst (6:35). This is the first of the great predicate I AM sayings, and in this movement, coming and believing really are the eating and drinking: the bread is Christ himself received by faith. Grant that fully and teach it fully; Catholics lose nothing here, for faith is the door of every sacrament. Note too the murmuring (6:41, *gongyzō*), the same grumbling root as the wilderness generation grumbling about the first manna, and the grim reminder: your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died (6:49).

Movement two begins at 6:51 with a turn of tense and substance: the bread which I shall give, future, is my flesh, for the life of the world, sacrificial. From here the vocabulary changes ecosystem: flesh, blood, eat, drink, food indeed, drink indeed. The Jews dispute among themselves, how can this man give us his flesh to eat, a literal reading, and here is the hinge your whole press turns on: for six chapters, whenever hearers took Jesus too literally, the text corrected them upward, sometimes by the narrator, sometimes by Jesus himself: the temple meant his body (2:21, the narrator's note), new birth meant birth of water and the Spirit (ch. 3), the living water was a spring welling up to eternal life (4:14), which John later identifies with the Spirit (7:39). The pattern has a signature, and your group knows it by heart because they have been tracking it. This is the one place the signature breaks. Faced with the literal reading, Jesus does not correct. He escalates: truly, truly, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you, and then the Greek verb itself coarsens, from *phagein*, to eat, to *trōgein* (6:54, 56, 57, 58), to chew, to eat with the accent on the physical act, a deliberately concrete verb (though not by itself decisive). He adds blood, the most offensive possible element to a Jewish ear, since Leviticus 17 forbade consuming blood on pain of being cut off, precisely because the life of the flesh is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11), and that reason is the point: the prohibition guarded the truth that now makes the gift possible; his life, in his blood, given to be our life. And when many of his own disciples call it a hard saying and abandon him over it (6:66), the great doctrinal walkout of the Gospels, he does not run after them shouting that it was a metaphor. He turns to the Twelve and asks, will you also go away?

Prepare 6:63 with special care, because the steelman's strongest leg stands on it: it is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail. Notice what Jesus does not say: he does not say my flesh is of no avail, which would unsay 6:51 (my flesh, for the life of the world) and 6:55 (my flesh is food indeed) within the same hour. In John, the flesh, absolutely, names natural human capacity and perception without the Spirit: that which is born of the flesh is flesh (3:6); you judge according to the flesh (8:15). The sentence answers the how of Capernaum's question: not by carnal cannibalism, chewing a limb, but by the Spirit's power, sacramentally, really. That is not a retreat from realism; it is realism's mode. Many Fathers read it so. And the earliest of them is nearly an eyewitness: St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, writes on his way to martyrdom around the year 107 that the heretics abstain from the Eucharist because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ. By the first decade of the second century, while the Gospel of John was still fresh in the churches, a bishop on his way to the lions was staking martyrdom on the realist reading.

End with Peter, because your group will need him. He does not say, Lord, I understand. He says, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Faith seeking understanding, loyalty outrunning comprehension: that is where most believers actually live, and Jesus accepts it. And one dark seed in the

last verses: did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil? Judas enters the story here, at the Eucharistic discourse, of all places. Open the betrayal line on the board quietly and move on.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Exodus 16.** The manna: bread from heaven, daily, for the murmuring wilderness generation. The typology the crowd itself cites (via Psalm 78:24), and the type Jesus claims to surpass: your fathers ate the manna, and they died.
- **2 Kings 4:42-44.** Elisha feeds a hundred with twenty barley loaves: they shall eat and have some left. Live discovery; the barley detail is John's breadcrumb.
- **Leviticus 17:10-14.** The blood prohibition and its reason: the life of the flesh is in the blood. Live discovery at the discourse's hardest edge.
- **Job 9:8 and Psalm 77:19.** God alone tramples the waves of the sea; His way through the sea, footprints unseen. Leader reads aloud at the sea crossing.
- **Exodus 12:8.** They shall eat the flesh. Leader knowledge ONLY, under the seal, until Session 13. The Passover lamb was not merely slain; it was eaten, and a Passover you did not eat was a Passover you did not keep.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-107), bishop and martyr, Letter to the Smyrnaeans 7

Writing around the year 107, under guard, on the road to the lions of Rome, Ignatius identifies the heretics of his day by a single test: they abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins. Ignatius was bishop of Antioch, writing about the year 107; ancient tradition places him in the circle that had known the apostles. The realist reading of John 6 is not a medieval accretion; it is the church of the eyewitnesses' own children, staking martyrdom on it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313-386), Doctor of the Church, Mystagogical Catecheses

Teaching the newly baptized in the very city of the upper room, Cyril instructs them not to judge the sacrament by taste: do not regard them as bare bread and wine, for by the Master's own declaration they are the Body and Blood of Christ. Though the senses suggest otherwise, he says, let faith make you firm; judge not by taste but be fully assured by faith. The fourth-century catechumen and the twenty-first-century communicant are given the same instruction, because the same declaration governs both.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Doctor of the Church, Adoro te devote

The Church's greatest mind wrote her humblest Eucharistic hymn. Sight, touch, and taste are all deceived in judging you, Aquinas sings to the hidden Christ, but hearing alone is safely believed: I believe whatever the Son of God has said; nothing is truer than this word of Truth. For Aquinas the entire act of Eucharistic faith rests where Peter rested at Capernaum: not on comprehension, and

not on the senses, but on the sheer reliability of the one speaking. Truth himself speaks truly, or there is nothing true.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1324.** The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life; all other sacraments and works of ministry are bound up with it and oriented toward it.
- **CCC 1336.** The first announcement of the Eucharist divided the disciples, just as the announcement of the Passion scandalized them: will you also go away? The Catechism itself reads John 6:66-67 as Eucharistic history repeating in every generation.
- **CCC 1374.** In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist, the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ is contained truly, really, and substantially.
- **CCC 1406.** The Catechism's own summary of this chapter: Jesus said, I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.
- **CCC 1385.** The examination before reception: let a man examine himself, and the requirement of the state of grace. For the Live It practice.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

The seven signs tally. Two entries in one night: Sign 4, the feeding of the five thousand (the only miracle in all four Gospels), and Sign 5, the walking on the sea. Expect debate on whether the sea crossing counts as a sign; welcome it. The tally likely stands at five.

I AM. Two entries and a new species: egō eimi spoken on the water (6:20), the bare theophanic form, and I am the bread of life (6:35), the first predicate I AM. There will be more predicates; keep them all on one line and let the group watch the sentence I AM the ___ start to structure the Gospel.

Passover and the Lamb (sealed). The discourse is deliberately timestamped to Passover (6:4), the second of three. Bread, flesh, blood, sacrifice, at Passover. The guesses are compounding fast. Under no circumstances resolve; Session 13 pays everything at once.

Sign-faith versus real faith. The thread's richest night: the crowd eats the sign and misses it (6:26), demands another the day after eating one (6:30), and the chapter ends sorting everyone by what they do when the teaching gets hard.

The betrayal (NEW). One of you is a devil (6:70-71). Judas enters at the Eucharistic discourse. Open the line quietly; it converges with the Hour and the Lamb in Session 13.

Give us this bread always. Set 6:34 beside 4:15, give me this water. The Samaritan woman and the Galilean crowd make the same request in different words, at the same depth; watch what each does when the answer turns out to cost something.

Session Goals

1. Participants can name the two movements of the discourse, bread received by faith (6:26-50) and flesh given as food (6:51-58), and what changes at verse 51.

2. Participants discover that the misunderstanding pattern breaks here: Jesus answers the literal reading with escalation, the Amen amen oath, added blood, and the verb trōgein.
3. Participants hear the symbolic reading at absolute full strength, including 6:63, and weigh it against the text, the pattern, and Ignatius of Antioch.
4. Participants can explain from Leviticus 17:11 why drinking blood was maximally offensive and why that very reason is the point of the gift.
5. Participants stand in the walkout of 6:66, hear will you also go away as addressed to them, and take Peter's answer home.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 12 minutes; trim the Win tonight. Build, 60 minutes; this chapter has earned the extra five. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 18 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: Build question 2 on the kingship (compress to two sentences of leader narration), the Elisha lookup in question 1 (narrate it instead of turning there), and the Dig Deeper on the manna's daily-ness. Do not cut, under any pressure: the verse 51 turn, the trōgein escalation, the Leviticus 17 discovery, the steelman chain, or the walkout and Peter's confession. If you must sacrifice polish anywhere else to protect those five, sacrifice it.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, bread of life, you fed five thousand on a hillside and then said something so hard that most of them left you. We are here tonight, which means we have not left yet. Give us honest minds for the hard saying, and when we run out of understanding, give us Peter's stubborn feet: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. Describe the single best meal of your life. What made it more than food?
2. Have you ever stayed loyal to a person or a commitment you did not fully understand at the time? What kept you there?

Transition: Tonight is the summit of the first half of our study. Keep your pencil on the tally board; nearly every thread we have planted is about to move.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 6:1-15 aloud. Then ask:

Question 1 (live discovery). Collect John's deliberate details: what feast is near (v. 4), what kind of loaves (v. 9), what does Jesus do with them (v. 11, listen for the verb), and what happens to the leftovers (v. 12-13)? Then send the group to 2 Kings 4:42-44 and ask who once did something like this, at what scale.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The Passover was at hand, and nothing in the story requires that note; John, many hear, is dating the theology as much as the geography, and your tally board should quietly log the word. Barley loaves: Elisha's miracle multiplied a hundredfold, twenty barley loaves for a hundred men with some left over becomes five loaves for five thousand with twelve baskets of fragments. The prophet's shadow, massively outgrown. The verb in verse 11 is *eucharistēsas*, having given thanks, the word the Church would take for her central act; and the gathered fragments are *klasmata*, the very term the earliest liturgies used for the Eucharistic fragments. Gather up the fragments, that nothing may be lost: John is writing with two hands, one telling a hillside story, one describing a liturgy his readers attended last Sunday.

Question 2. Read verses 14-15 again. The crowd concludes he is the prophet who is to come, and moves to make him king, by force. That sounds like success. Why does Jesus flee from it?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Because they are right about the title and wrong about the throne. A bread king, a wonder-working provider who fills stomachs on demand, is exactly the kingship this chapter will spend fifty verses dismantling. They want him for what he dispenses; he has come to give what he is. He withdraws alone to the mountain rather than accept coronation on their terms, and the refusal is a preview: this king will be lifted up, but not the way they mean.

Question 3. Read 6:16-21. Dark, wind, three or four miles out. What do the disciples see, and, listen to the Greek behind it is I, what exactly does Jesus say? Leader: read Job 9:8 and Psalm 77:19 aloud over the scene. What is John showing us?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

They see Jesus walking on the sea, and his word is *egō eimi*, I AM; do not be afraid. Job says God alone trampled the waves of the sea; the psalmist says God's way was through the sea, yet His footprints were unseen. Tonight footprints appear on the water, and the voice above them speaks the divine name-sentence. Log it: the I AM line takes its second entry, and this one is a theophany. Log Sign 5 as well, and let the group argue whether a private sign for twelve counts; the arguing is the point of the tally.

Question 4. Read 6:25-34. The crowd finds him and Jesus X-rays their motives in one sentence: you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. What is the difference between those two things? They then demand manna credentials, and end by pleading, Lord, give us this bread always. Where exactly have we heard that sentence shape before?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Seeing the sign means reading what the bread pointed to; eating your fill means stopping at the bread. It is the sharpest sentence yet on the sign-faith line: they consumed the miracle and missed its meaning, and by the next morning they are asking, what sign do you do?, to the man who fed five thousand of them yesterday. Spectacle-faith has the memory of a mayfly. And the plea, give us this bread always, is almost the well's request over again: give me this water, that I may not thirst (4:15). Two chapters, two thirsts, the same request in the same shape, and the same answer coming: what you are asking for is standing in front of you, and it will cost more than you think.

Question 5. Read 6:35-50. There it is: I am the bread of life. First, the form of the sentence: what new kind of I AM is this, for the board? Second, read verse 35 closely: in this stretch of the discourse, what do eating and drinking plainly mean? Be honest with the text. Third, verse 41: the Jews murmured, *gongyzō*. Whose sound is that?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The first predicate I AM: not just the bare divine *egō eimi* but I AM the bread of life, a sentence with a claim on both ends. There will be more like it; the board gets a new species on the same line. Second, in verses 35 through 50, eating and drinking are transparently coming and believing: he who comes to me shall not hunger, he who believes in me shall never thirst. Say so plainly and grant it fully; the bread in this movement is Christ himself received by faith, and no Catholic loses an inch by admitting it, because faith is the door of every sacrament. Hold the movement distinction firmly; the honesty of everything that follows depends on it. Third, *gongyzō* is the wilderness word: the murmuring of the manna generation (Exodus 16), reprised on cue by their descendants, about bread, again. And Jesus' verdict on the first manna is a tombstone: your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. Whatever he is offering, it intends to outperform the type.

Question 6 (live discovery). Now read 6:51-58 slowly, and watch for the turn. What changes at verse 51, in tense and in substance? What question do the Jews dispute at verse 52? Then track Jesus'

response: does he soften, and what happens to the eating verb in verses 54 through 58? Finally, send the group to Leviticus 17:10-11: what did the Law say about consuming blood, what penalty, and, the crucial line, what reason does God give?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

At verse 51 the discourse changes gears audibly: the bread which I shall give, future tense, is my flesh, for the life of the world, the language of sacrifice, of a giving that costs the giver. The Jews take him literally, how can this man give us his flesh to eat, and instead of softening, Jesus swears: truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. And the verb changes: from *phagein*, the ordinary word for eat, John's text shifts to *trōgein*, a more concrete verb usually rendered chew or gnaw, four times in five verses (6:54, 56, 57, 58), exactly where the discourse turns hardest. The shift is striking, and it is not the direction a speaker moves when he is softening a figure of speech; it is not by itself decisive, but it is real. Then Leviticus: whoever eats blood shall be cut off, one of the Law's severest sanctions, being cut off, and the reason is the theology: for the life of the flesh is in the blood. To drink blood was to claim a creature's life; that is why it was forbidden, and that is why, the Church has heard, it can now be commanded. The prohibition stood guard for centuries over the truth that makes the gift possible: the life is in the blood, and he is offering us his. My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. The room should be feeling what Capernaum felt. Good. Now build the other side at full strength.

Steelman: A Hard Saying, The Case for the Symbolic Reading

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

This is the strongest steelman of our study, and parts of it are built from our own tally board, so give it everything. Leg one: the misunderstanding pattern. All study long we have watched hearers take Jesus too literally, the temple, the new birth, the water, and be wrong every time. The crowd at Capernaum takes his flesh literally; on our own pattern, the argument runs, they are the ones misreading, and Catholics have simply joined the crowd. Leg two: Jesus defined his own metaphor at 6:35: coming is the eating, believing is the drinking; the whole discourse is glossed as faith from the start. Leg three, the strongest: Jesus himself closes the discourse saying, it is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life (6:63). There is the master key, the argument runs: the discourse was spiritual; a literal flesh-eating reading is precisely the fleshly thinking that avails nothing. Leg four: John, alone of the four evangelists, records no institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper; if chapter 6 were his Eucharistic doctrine, the omission is strange, and Capernaum had no chalice: no sacrament existed for his hearers to receive. Leg five: Jesus, a faithful son of the Law, would not command what Leviticus forbade. The conclusion: eat my flesh means believe in my sacrifice, vividly put, and nothing more. Let it stand. It is a serious case made by serious Christians, and the group should feel its weight before anyone answers it.

Question 7 (press from the text). Take the legs in order, and start with our own tally board, since leg one borrowed it. The misunderstanding pattern has a signature: when hearers go too literal, what always happens next, at the temple, with Nicodemus, at the well? Now look at Capernaum: when they take his flesh literally, what does Jesus do next, in verses 53 through 58? Then 6:63: what does the flesh

mean elsewhere in this Gospel (3:6, and later 8:15), and can Jesus mean my flesh avails nothing an hour after verse 51? Then the walkout at 6:66: what does Jesus not do as they leave? Finally: what did the generation that personally knew the apostles believe about this?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Leg one reverses on inspection, and the group's own board proves it. The pattern's signature is correction: too-literal hearers are again and again lifted upward, by the narrator (he spoke of the temple of his body), or by Jesus himself (unless one is born of water and the Spirit; the water I give will become a spring). Every time so far, for six chapters. Here, at the one place the stakes are highest, the signature breaks: faced with the literal reading, Jesus corrects nothing. He escalates, swears his double Amen, adds blood, and grinds the verb down to gnaw, four times. If Capernaum misunderstood, this is the only misunderstanding in the Gospel that Jesus answered by making it worse. Leg two: granted, and we granted it before the steelman was built; 6:35 governs the faith movement, verses 26 to 50. But the turn at verse 51 is in the text, future tense, sacrificial for, and a new vocabulary; faith and sacrament are not rivals, they are movements one and two of one discourse: faith is how you come, the flesh is what you are fed. Leg three: the flesh, absolutely, is Johannine for natural human capacity without the Spirit, that which is born of the flesh is flesh (3:6), you judge according to the flesh (8:15). Jesus cannot mean his own flesh avails nothing, or verse 51, my flesh, for the life of the world, and verse 55, my flesh is food indeed, died within the hour. Verse 63 answers Capernaum's how: not by carnal capacity, not by butchery, but by the Spirit, which is precisely the Catholic doctrine: real, and sacramental, not crass. Leg four: John writes last, for churches that had celebrated the Eucharist weekly for two generations; he supplements rather than repeats, gives the theology whose liturgy his readers lived, and leaves his fingerprints anyway: eucharistēsas, klasmata, and a Passover timestamp on the whole chapter. Leg five: Leviticus forbade blood because the life is in the blood, guarding the very truth that now makes the command intelligible: his life, in his blood, given as ours. And the walkout: many of his disciples drew back and no longer walked with him, the only doctrinal desertion in the four Gospels, and Jesus lets them go. Not one syllable of, wait, it was a figure of speech. He turns to the Twelve and raises the stakes instead: will you also go away? Not long after, St. Ignatius of Antioch, on the road to martyrdom around the year 107, defines heresy by this very test: they abstain from the Eucharist because they do not confess that it is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ. The realist reading is not the crowd's error canonized; it is the reading the eyewitnesses' own children died for.

Question 8. Read 6:60-71. Sit in it. Many disciples, not enemies, disciples, call it a hard saying and leave. Jesus watches them go and asks the Twelve: will you also go away? Read Peter's answer aloud twice. What does Peter conspicuously not say, and why is what he does say enough? And do not miss verse 70: who else enters the story tonight?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Peter does not say, Lord, we understand. He says, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God. Loyalty outrunning comprehension: he has decided about the person, and so he stays through the teaching. That is where most real faith actually lives, and Jesus accepts it without complaint. The Catechism reads this very scene as the Eucharist's permanent history: the first announcement divided the disciples, and it divides them still (CCC 1336); every generation since Capernaum has had its verse

66, and every Mass quietly asks the Twelve's question again. And verse 70: did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil? Judas enters the Gospel here, of all places, at the Eucharistic discourse. Open the betrayal line on the board, write the reference, and say nothing more.

DIG DEEPER

Daily bread. If the group has energy: the manna of Exodus 16 could not be stockpiled; it bred worms overnight, and had to be gathered new every morning. The gift was designed to create daily dependence. When the Church prays give us this day our daily bread, and when she celebrates the Eucharist daily, she is living inside that design. The bread of life is not a pantry staple; it is a morning-by-morning relationship, which is exactly what the crowd, demanding a bread king with a full warehouse, did not want.

Synthesis question. You were on the hillside; you ate the loaves; you heard the discourse; you watched the crowd thin out. Honestly: what would you have done that day at Capernaum? And what, in fact, do you do this Sunday?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Do not rush past the discomfort; the two questions are one question wearing different clothes. Every Sunday the same Lord says the same thing over bread, this is my body, and the same three responses remain available: leave, stay confused but stay, or kneel. The Church calls the Eucharist the source and summit of the Christian life (CCC 1324) because everything this study has traced, the tent, the temple of his body, the wine at the wedding, the living water, the bread on the hillside, is aimed at the moment a communicant answers Capernaum's question with their body: Amen. If the room lands on Peter's sentence, to whom shall we go, the summit session has done its work.

Send

1. Do you take offense at this? (6:61). Everyone has a hard saying, the teaching they carry uncomfortably. What is yours, and what do you do with it: leave it, shelve it, or bring it to him?
2. Peter's faith was loyalty outrunning comprehension. Where in your life right now is God asking you to stay before you understand?

Live It This Week

- **Receive like it is true.** This Sunday, prepare on purpose: keep the Communion fast, arrive early enough to pray, and at the invitation to Communion make Aquinas's act of faith your own: I believe whatever the Son of God has said. Then walk to the altar as if John 6 were true, because it is.
- **Fifteen minutes with the answer.** Make one visit to the tabernacle or adoration this week, fifteen minutes, no agenda. Bring only Peter's sentence: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Say it once and stay.
- **Examine before you approach.** The Church asks us to examine ourselves before receiving (CCC 1385). Take ten honest minutes this week; if the examination turns up something serious, the same

Lord who feeds at one altar forgives in the confessional, and the second is the road back to the first.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, bread of life, flesh given for the life of the world, the crowd wanted a king who would fill their hands, and you offered them your hands instead. We do not fully understand; we are staying anyway. To whom else would we go? You have the words of eternal life. Feed us this Sunday with what you promised at Capernaum, and let us never receive you carelessly again. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 6:68

Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 7, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 6:1-15**, opening reading, Passover at hand (v. 4), barley loaves, eucharistēsas, klasmata, the bread king refused
- **2 Kings 4:42-44**, live discovery, Elisha's barley loaves, they shall eat and have some left
- **John 6:16-21**, the sea crossing, egō eimi on the water
- **Job 9:8 and Psalm 77:19**, leader reads aloud, God alone tramples the waves, footprints unseen
- **John 6:25-34**, you ate your fill, the manna demand (Psalm 78:24 cited in text), give us this bread always
- **John 4:15**, cross-reference, give me this water; the parallel plea
- **Exodus 16**, leader background, the manna and the murmuring; gongyzō
- **John 6:35-50**, movement one, I am the bread of life, coming and believing, your fathers ate and died
- **John 6:51-58**, movement two, the turn, the dispute, the escalation, trōgein, food indeed and drink indeed
- **Leviticus 17:10-14**, live discovery, the blood prohibition and its reason, the life is in the blood
- **John 6:60-71**, the hard saying, verse 63, the walkout, Peter's confession, Judas planted
- **John 3:6 and 8:15**, press references, the flesh as natural capacity in Johannine usage
- **Exodus 12:8**, LEADER ONLY, under seal until Session 13: they shall eat the flesh
- **CCC 1324, 1336, 1374, 1385, 1406**, Catechism connections

BEHOLD THE LAMB: SESSION 8

Before Abraham Was, I AM

John 7-8 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that the Feast of Tabernacles, with its water-drawing ceremony and its blazing candelabras, is the stage set on which Jesus makes his two great claims of these chapters, living water and light of the world, and that the whole crescendo resolves into three syllables that get stones picked up: before Abraham was, I AM. They also discover, at last, what has been restraining the death plot: his hour had not yet come.

Catholic Touchstone: The divine name. The Catechism teaches that Jesus reveals that he himself bears the name I AM (CCC 211), the name given to Moses at the burning bush, and that believing he is I AM is, in his own words, a matter of life and death (8:24; CCC 590). Tonight the tally line the group opened at a Samaritan well reaches its summit.

What You Need to Know

Everything in these two chapters happens at one feast, and the feast is doing half the preaching, so learn its liturgy before you walk in. Tabernacles, *Sukkoth*, was the joyful autumn feast commanded in Leviticus 23:33-43: seven days living in booths to remember the wilderness years, when Israel had no house, no cistern, and no lamp, and God supplied water from the rock and light from the pillar of fire. Second Temple practice built two great ceremonies on those memories. Each morning of the feast, a priest led a procession to the Pool of Siloam, drew water in a golden pitcher, and poured it out at the altar while, as later tradition describes the rite, Isaiah 12:3 was sung, with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation, praying for the autumn rains and for the prophesied rivers of the age to come, when living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:8). And each evening, four towering golden candelabras were lit in the Court of the Women, by the temple treasury, and the rabbis said there was no courtyard in Jerusalem that did not glow with their light, the pillar of fire remembered in flame. Hold both ceremonies in your hand, because Jesus is about to stand up in the middle of each one and claim to be what it was asking for.

Chapter 7 opens with Jesus' own brothers, his kinsmen, goading him in unbelief and Jesus going up to the feast quietly, on his own clock: my time has not yet come. The crowds spend the whole feast split, and John keeps count of the fractures: some said he is a good man, others said no, he is leading the people astray (7:12); can this be the Christ? (7:26); this is really the prophet, this is the Christ, but can the Christ come from Galilee? (7:40-41). Note the pattern for your group: nobody at this feast manages to stay neutral about Jesus, and the middle keeps collapsing. Then, at 7:30, the sentence your board has been waiting for since Session 6: they sought to arrest him; but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. There it is. The death plot opened at 5:18 and has been straining forward ever since, and tonight the group discovers what the restraint is called. It happens again at 8:20, word for word, in the treasury itself, with the authorities standing right there. Make the board moment count: draw the line connecting the death plot to the Hour. The plot cannot fire until the Hour permits, which

means the cross, when it comes, will not be an accident that catches Jesus out; it will be an appointment he keeps.

Then the water cry. On the last day of the feast, the great day, with the week's water rite either at its height or just ended, since the sources leave open whether John's great day is the seventh day of the pouring or the eighth, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, if any one thirst, let him come to me and drink (7:37). Either way the cry lands on the ceremony, as a climax or as the filling of its absence. For seven days Jerusalem had watched water poured out at the altar while singing about wells of salvation; on the great day a Galilean stands up in the crowd and announces that the well is a person. And John steps forward with the gloss that resolves one of our oldest threads: now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (7:39). The living water promised to the Samaritan woman is named at last: the Holy Spirit. But notice the hinge John hangs it on: not yet given, because not yet glorified. The water waits on the glory, and in this Gospel, as your lifted up line already whispers, the glory begins at the cross; John will not let it be separated from the rising and the return to the Father, but the lifting up is where it starts. A textual note for your preparation: verse 38 can be punctuated so that the rivers flow from the believer's heart or from Christ's; both readings are ancient, and the Church's devotion has long heard the second alongside the first, for reasons a certain soldier's spear will make plain in Session 13. Hold it with open hands and say nothing forward-looking.

The chapter ends with two gifts. Nicodemus resurfaces (7:50-52), the man from the night, now speaking up in the council for due process: does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing? It costs him a sneer, are you from Galilee too? Your group was told in Session 4 to keep watching this man; let them enjoy the sighting. He is moving, slowly, from night toward day, and his arc has one scene left. And the experts hand us an irony: search, and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee (7:52). Their searching is as sloppy as it is confident: Jonah came from Gath-hepher, in what became Galilee, from Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25), and not one of them asks where this Nazarene was actually born. The same men who search the Scriptures (5:39) cannot be bothered to search a birth record. Diligence in the text without willingness toward the person: chapter 5's diagnosis, walking around at a feast.

The woman caught in adultery (7:53-8:11) needs honest handling on two fronts, and your group can bear both. Textually: the passage is absent from the earliest Greek manuscripts, and the RSV2CE, like most modern Bibles, prints it with a footnote saying so; it may well have circulated as a cherished independent memory before finding this home before finding its home here. Canonically: the Church receives it without hesitation as inspired Scripture, part of the canon affirmed at Trent with all its parts; a passage's travel history is not a verdict on its truth. Then teach the scene itself, which is a perfect trap perfectly escaped: Moses commanded stoning, capital execution, as John presents it (18:31), lay with Rome; condemn her and lose the crowd and break Roman law, release her and break Moses. Jesus writes on the ground, the only time Scripture shows him writing, and no one knows what; then one sentence, let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her, and the accusers drain away, eldest first, the ones with the longest memories. Augustine's summary of the final tableau has never been bettered: two were left, the wretched woman and Mercy. And the last exchange holds the full Catholic balance in two clauses that must never be separated: neither do I condemn you, mercy without condition, and, go, and do not sin again, mercy with direction. Absolution and amendment: every confessional in the world runs on this verse.

Chapter 8 then rises in three steps to the summit. Step one: I am the light of the world (8:12), spoken in the treasury (8:20), which is to say in the Court of the Women, in the very court of the great candelabras, as tradition stages it of the feast, or beside their cold stands if the feast had just ended:

either way, the second predicate I AM lands on the second ceremony. Step two: the absolute uses begin. You will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he (RSV2CE; the Greek a bare egō eimi) (8:24): no predicate, nothing to complete the sentence, and believing it is life or death. When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he (8:28): the second lifted up saying, and it fuses with the Name; the cross will be the demonstration of the I AM. Two of your board's longest lines cross here; draw the intersection. Step three: the summit. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad... Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM (8:56-58). The Greek is a deliberate collision of verbs: *prin Abraam genesthai, egō eimi*, before Abraham came to be, I AM. Not I was, which would claim mere priority; the timeless present against the creature's becoming, the same deep contrast the group met in the Prologue, being against becoming in Session 1, where created things were made and the Word simply was. And now, at last, deploy the text you have held in reserve since the well: Exodus 3:14. The steelman gets its full hearing first; the press is where Moses' bush finally burns for your group. They took up stones: Leviticus 24:16 prescribed stoning for blaspheming the Name, and these hearers, steeped in their Scriptures and their languages and whose theology was professional, reached for rocks, not rebuttals. As at 5:18, John records no correction of their reading, because they heard a divine claim, and the narrative lets their hearing stand. Jesus hid himself and left the temple: the Hour, still, had not yet come.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Leviticus 23:33-43.** The institution of Tabernacles: booths, memory of the wilderness, the feast of joy. Leader background for the stage set.
- **Isaiah 12:3 and Zechariah 14:8.** Wells of salvation, and living waters flowing out from Jerusalem: the songs and hopes of the water ceremony. Leader reads Isaiah 12:3 aloud at the water cry.
- **Exodus 13:21.** The pillar of fire: the memory behind the candelabras and the claim behind the light of the world. Leader background.
- **Exodus 3:13-15.** I AM WHO I AM; say this to the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you. THE live discovery of the study's I AM thread, held since Session 5 and deployed tonight.
- **Isaiah 43:10-13.** That you may know and believe me and understand that I am He; the Greek Old Testament renders it egō eimi, God's exclusive self-declaration. Live discovery inside the steelman press.
- **Leviticus 24:16.** Stoning as the penalty for blaspheming the Name: why the stones at 8:59 are an act of interpretation. Quick reference.
- **2 Kings 14:25.** Jonah, from Gath-hepher in Galilee: the fact the experts' search missed. One-line irony.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Doctor of the Church, Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 33

On the woman caught in adultery, Augustine compresses the final tableau into four Latin words the Church has never forgotten: *relicti sunt duo, misera et misericordia*, two were left, the wretched woman and Mercy. The accusers, he notes, were not refuted; they were remembered to themselves, and they left eldest first. And he will not let mercy be softened into permission: the Lord condemned the sin, not the sinner, for he did not say, go and sin, but go, and sin no more. Mercy

meets us where we are and refuses to leave us there.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Hilary of Poitiers (c. 310-367), Doctor of the Church, On the Trinity, Book 1

Hilary tells us his own conversion turned on the divine name. Searching the philosophers for what God is, he opened Moses and was stopped cold by the words from the bush: I AM WHO I AM. No definition, he marveled, could be more worthy of God than being itself, absolute, unbegun, unending. And then he opened John and found the same eternity speaking in time: in the beginning was the Word. What the bush declared and the Prologue confessed, Jesus speaks in the first person at 8:58, and Hilary spent his life and his exile defending the identity.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), Doctor of the Church, Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homily 55

Chrysostom fastens on the verbs of 8:58. Jesus did not say, before Abraham was, I was, which would merely outrank the patriarch; he said I AM, and Chrysostom hears the deliberate echo: as the Father uses the name I AM, so does Christ, for it signifies continuous being, exempt from all time. That, Chrysostom says, is why they took up stones: they heard not a claim of age but a claim of the Name, and, unwilling to worship, they reached for the penalty instead.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 206-207.** The mystery of the divine name revealed at the bush: I AM WHO I AM, the name that is not a definition to master but a God who is faithfully, mysteriously present.
- **CCC 211.** The Catechism's own reading of tonight: Jesus reveals that he himself bears the divine name, citing when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM.
- **CCC 590.** Jesus asked his hearers to believe that I am he (RSV2CE; the Greek *a bare egō eimi*), on pain of dying in their sins; only a divine identity can justify so absolute a demand.
- **CCC 748.** Christ is the light of humanity: the opening words of the Council's great constitution on the Church, which exists only to reflect his light, as the moon reflects the sun.
- **CCC 1846-1848.** The Gospel is the revelation of God's mercy to sinners, and grace must uncover sin in order to convert the heart: the anatomy of neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

The Hour (mechanism REVEALED). Twice tonight, 7:30 and 8:20: no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. The group discovers what restrains the death plot. Draw the connecting line on the board between the two threads, and name the implication aloud once: the cross will be kept like an appointment, not suffered like an ambush. Resolve nothing further.

I AM (CRESCENDO). Four entries in one night: light of the world (8:12, second predicate), and the absolute uses at 8:24, 8:28, and the summit at 8:58, with Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 43:10 finally deployed. The Baptist's I am not is now fully paid. The line is not finished; there are more predicates

ahead, and one absolute use in a garden that will knock soldiers down. Say nothing of it.

Lifted up. Second saying, 8:28, and it fuses with the Name: when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he. Mark the intersection of the two lines. One saying remains.

Living water (NAMED). John's gloss at 7:39 names the water as the Holy Spirit, resolving the promise of chapter 4, and hangs the gift on a hinge: not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. The hinge connects this line to the Hour and the lifting up. Note the connection without explaining it.

Light and darkness. Major advance at 8:12 under the feast's candelabras. Next session is the thread's masterpiece; end tonight with the line glowing.

Nicodemus. Second sighting (7:50-52), speaking up at cost. The group was told to watch him; reward the watchers. One scene remains, and it is leader knowledge only.

The seven signs tally. No new signs tonight; two chapters of words at a feast. Tell the group the drought ends next week, spectacularly.

Session Goals

1. Participants can describe the two ceremonies of Tabernacles and map Jesus' water and light claims onto them.
2. Participants discover at 7:30 and 8:20 that the Hour is the restraint on the death plot, and can state what that means about the cross.
3. Participants can hold the textual honesty and the canonical confidence of the adulteress passage together, and can recite its two inseparable clauses.
4. Participants hear the strongest case that *egō eimi* is ordinary Greek, and weigh it against the tense collision of 8:58, Exodus 3, Isaiah 43, and the stones.
5. Participants can explain why the audience reached for rocks, and why John, as at 5:18, records no correction of their reading.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 12 minutes. Build, 60 minutes; two chapters have earned it. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 18 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: Build question 1's discussion portion (teach the feast in three minutes of straight narration and move), the Jonah irony in question 4 (one sentence), and the Dig Deeper on the freedom saying. Do not cut: the 7:30 Hour discovery, the water cry with John's gloss, the adulteress, or anything from 8:24 to the end. The last twenty minutes of Build belong to the Name; guard them like the treasury.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Father, at the feast of booths your people remembered the wilderness, when they had no roof, no well, and no lamp but you. We come to you the same way tonight. Jesus, light of the world, fountain of living water, speak your Name over us, and let us never hear it without wonder. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. Have you ever been somewhere, a festival, a stadium, a vigil, where the atmosphere itself made everything said and done feel ten times bigger? What made it work?
2. What is the boldest true thing you have ever heard someone say out loud, knowing what it would cost them?

Transition: Tonight covers two chapters and one feast, and the feast is half the sermon. Before we read, you need to see the stage.

Build (inductive discovery)

Question 1. Leader teaches for three minutes, then asks. The setting is Tabernacles: a week in booths remembering the wilderness, when Israel had no house, no well, no lamp, and God gave water from the rock and fire in the pillar. Two ceremonies dominated the feast: every morning, water carried from the Pool of Siloam in a golden pitcher and poured out at the altar while the people sang, with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation; every evening, four giant golden candelabras blazing in the temple courts, said to light every courtyard in Jerusalem. Now read John 7:1-13. The crowds spend the feast arguing about Jesus. List the verdicts you hear in verse 12, and notice what verdict is missing.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He is a good man; no, he is leading the people astray. Later the feast adds: this is the prophet, this is the Christ, can the Christ come from Galilee? The missing verdict is the modern favorite: he is fine, it does not matter, no opinion required. Nobody at Tabernacles manages neutrality; the middle keeps collapsing, and John counts the fractures on purpose. And hold the two ceremonies in your hand all night: water and light. Watch what Jesus does with each.

Question 2. Read 7:25-32. The authorities finally move: they sought to arrest him. Read verse 30 aloud, slowly, twice. Since Session 6 our board has carried a death plot straining forward. What has been holding it back, and what is the restraint called? What does this mean about how the story is going to end?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

No one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. There it is: the restraint on the death plot has a name, and it is the phrase the board has carried since a wedding in Cana. Draw the line connecting the two threads and let the group feel the architecture snap together. And say the implication once, plainly: the plot cannot fire until the Hour permits. Whatever happens at the end of this Gospel will not be an ambush that catches Jesus out; it will be an appointment he keeps, at a

time already set. It happens again, word for word, at 8:20, with the authorities standing in the same room as him. Twice in one feast, the trap closes on air.

Question 3. Read 7:37-39. Picture the staging: seven mornings of golden pitchers and poured water and Isaiah's song about wells of salvation, and then, on the last day, the great day, a Galilean stands up in the crowd and shouts. What does he claim? And read John's explanation in verse 39 with our board in view: which of our oldest threads just got named, and what strange condition does John attach to the gift?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink: the well the ceremony was singing about is a person, standing in the crowd. Leader, read Isaiah 12:3 aloud here. And verse 39 resolves a thread the board has carried since a well in Samaria: the living water is the Holy Spirit, named at last. But John hangs the gift on a hinge: as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. The water waits on the glory. File the hinge next to the lifted up line and say nothing more; the group does not yet know what this Gospel means by glorified, and they should be allowed to find out the hard way.

Question 4. Read 7:40-52. More fractures, officers coming back empty-handed and starstruck (no man ever spoke like this man!), and then a familiar face. Who speaks up in the council, what does he risk by it, and where have we met him? And savor the experts' parting shot in verse 52: search, and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee. What is wrong with their search?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Nicodemus, the man who came by night in chapter 3, now speaking up in daylight company: does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing? It earns him contempt, are you from Galilee too?, which in that room was an insult. The group was told to keep watching him; here he is, moving, slowly, from night toward voice. As for the experts: their search is as sloppy as it is smug. Jonah came from Gath-hepher, in what became Galilee, from Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25), and not one of these scholars asks the obvious question about where this Nazarene was actually born. The same men who search the Scriptures (5:39) cannot be bothered to search a birth record. Diligence without willingness: chapter 5's diagnosis, out for a walk at a feast.

Question 5. Read 7:53-8:11. Two honest notes before discussing: your Bible probably footnotes this passage as absent from the earliest manuscripts, and it is; it seems to have traveled on its own as a cherished apostolic memory before settling here. And the Church receives it, without hesitation, as inspired canonical Scripture; a passage's travel history is not a verdict on its truth. Now the scene: why is the question a perfect trap? What does Jesus' one sentence do to the accusers? And weigh the final exchange: what two things does Jesus say to her, and what happens if you keep only one of them?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The trap: Moses commanded stoning for adultery, and capital execution, as John presents it (18:31), lay with Rome; condemn her and he breaks Roman law and his own reputation for mercy, release her and he breaks Moses. There is no safe answer, which is the design. Jesus stoops and writes on the ground, the only time Scripture shows him writing, and no one knows what; then: let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her. He does not deny the Law; he appoints

qualified executioners, and the court adjourns itself, eldest first, the longest memories leaving soonest. Augustine's four words: two were left, the wretched woman and Mercy. And the ending holds the entire Catholic doctrine of mercy in two clauses that must never be separated: neither do I condemn you, and, go, and do not sin again. Keep only the first and mercy curdles into permission; keep only the second and the Law returns with stones in its hand. Absolution and amendment, mercy and direction: every confessional on earth runs on this verse, and the sinners in the room, all of us, should hear it as addressed personally.

Question 6. Read 8:12-20. I am the light of the world. Two observations to make: first, verse 20 tells us where he said it; what stood in that courtyard during this feast? Second, for the board: what kind of I AM is this, and what does verse 20 repeat that we heard at 7:30?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He spoke in the treasury, which stood in the Court of the Women, exactly where the four great candelabras of the feast blazed each evening, the remembered pillar of fire. Under that light, or beside its cold stands, he says: I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Second ceremony, second claim: first the water, now the fire. Log the second predicate I AM on the board. And verse 20 closes with the shield again, word for word: no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come. In the treasury, surrounded by authorities, untouchable, until the appointment.

Question 7. Read 8:21-30, and listen for two sentences that our board is about to feast on. Verse 24: what must they believe, on pain of what, and notice, believe that he is what, exactly? The sentence has no ending. And verse 28: which two of our threads just crossed?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

You will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he (RSV2CE; the Greek a bare egō eimi): egō eimi, absolute, no predicate, nothing completing the thought. Translators patch it (that I am he), but the Greek just stops, and believing it is declared a matter of eternal life or death, which is an insane demand unless the unfinished sentence is a Name. And verse 28: when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he. The second lifted up saying, fused with the Name: the cross itself will be the demonstration of who he is. Two of the board's longest lines cross here; draw the intersection and let it stand without commentary. The chapter is climbing; one step remains.

Question 8. Read 8:48-59, and slow down at the last exchange. They ask how a man not yet fifty can have seen Abraham. Listen to the exact verbs of the answer: before Abraham was, I AM. What two verbs collide in that sentence, and where did this study first teach us to notice exactly that grammar? And what do the hearers do next, and what does their reaction tell us about what they heard?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The Greek collides on purpose: prin Abraam genesthai, egō eimi, before Abraham came to be, I AM. Not I was, which would merely outrank the patriarch. Becoming against being, the creature's genesthai against the timeless present, and the group has met this grammar before, in Session 1, in the Prologue: all things were made, but the Word simply was. Verse 58 is the Prologue spoken in the

first person, out loud, at a feast, to armed theologians. And their reaction is itself exegesis: they took up stones to throw at him, the Leviticus 24:16 penalty for blaspheming the Name. These hearers were at home in the Scriptures and in the languages of their own world, and their theology was professional, and they reached for rocks, not rebuttals. Note, as at 5:18, what John does not do: he does not say they misunderstood. Hold everyone right here; before we answer what this sentence means, we owe the other reading its full strength.

Steelman: Is I AM Just Ordinary Greek?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

Skeptical scholars, Unitarians, and Jehovah's Witnesses press a genuinely serious objection here, and it deserves its full weight. *Egō eimi*, the argument runs, is perfectly ordinary Greek for it is I or I am he. It is not automatically the divine name: next week, in fact, a healed beggar will use the identical two words about himself (9:9, I am the man), and nobody will accuse him of claiming deity. So at 8:58 Jesus may be claiming something remarkable, pre-existence, priority over Abraham, the way the Baptist said he was before me, and even messianic pre-existence was thinkable in some Jewish speculation without any claim to be the God of Israel. On this reading, before Abraham was, I am means I existed before Abraham did: an astonishing claim, but a claim of age and rank, not of the Name. The crowd's stones prove only that they thought him arrogant or blasphemous in a broad sense, and Catholic apologists, the argument concludes, have loaded two ordinary Greek words with a burning bush they cannot carry. State it fairly; the 9:9 usage is real, and the grammar point is honest.

Question 9 (press from the text, live discovery). Three probes, and two of them are lookups. First, the grammar the steelman skips: if Jesus meant only I existed before Abraham, what tense would the sentence use, and what tense does it use? Second: send half the group to Exodus 3:13-15, the text this study has kept in reserve for four sessions, and read God's answer to Moses aloud. Send the other half to Isaiah 43:10-13 and read God's courtroom speech: that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He. Third: weigh the audience. Who stood closer to that language and those Scriptures, we or they, and what did they reach for?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

First, the tense: mere priority says I was, and Greek says it easily; the Baptist said exactly that (he was before me, 1:30). Jesus refuses the past tense: before Abraham came to be, I AM, the timeless present set against the creature's becoming, a sentence that is a deliberate clash of tenses, ordinary grammar carrying extraordinary freight. Second, the discoveries: at the bush, God names Himself I AM WHO I AM; say this to the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you. And in Isaiah's courtroom, the Greek Old Testament that John's readers used renders God's refrain with the very words *egō eimi*: that you may know and believe me and understand that I AM. Absolute, predicate-less *egō eimi* was the Greek Bible's signature for the self-declaration of the God of Israel, and Jesus has now used it that way at 8:24, 8:28, and 8:58, in a Gospel whose first sentence called him God. Third, the 9:9 point actually sharpens ours: John knows the ordinary usage perfectly well and shows us a beggar using it, which is precisely how we know the marked usages are marked; a healed man saying I am the man has an antecedent in plain view (the dialogue supplies the man), while 8:58

has nothing to complete it except Exodus and Isaiah. And the audience: hearers at home in the language and the Scriptures of that world, professional theologians, who heard the sentence in real time and reached for the Leviticus 24 penalty for blaspheming the Name. They stood far closer to that sentence than we do, and their verdict was stones. The Catechism states the Church's reading without a tremor: Jesus reveals that he himself bears the divine name (CCC 211). The tally line that opened at a Samaritan well has reached the bush, and the bush is burning.

DIG DEEPER

The truth will make you free. If the group has energy, read 8:31-36. The crowd bristles, we are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to any one, a startling claim from a people who had been slaves in Egypt, exiles in Babylon, and were currently occupied by Rome. Denial is the first symptom. Jesus relocates the slavery: every one who commits sin is a slave to sin, and only the Son can emancipate: if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. Freedom in this Gospel is not the absence of a master; it is having the right one.

Synthesis question. The feast handed him its two ceremonies, and he stood up in the middle of each. Put the whole night in three claims: what did he claim by the water, what did he claim by the light, and what did he claim by the Name? And the question John has been building for eight chapters: the crowd split three ways all week; what keeps their question from staying safely theirs?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

By the water: the wells of salvation the feast sang about are a person, and the rivers of the age to come are the Spirit he will pour out. By the light: the pillar of fire that led the wilderness camp burns now at head height, and following him is how you stop walking in darkness. By the Name: before Abraham came to be, I AM, the sentence of the bush, spoken in the first person by a Galilean at a feast. Every verdict at Tabernacles, good man, deceiver, prophet, Christ, blasphemer, was an answer to a question nobody could put down, and the question does not stay in the first century: the light of the world does not offer commentary from a distance, and the middle is still collapsing. Sooner or later everyone at this table either reaches for stones or falls on their knees; the one thing 8:58 forbids is a shrug.

Send

1. Every one who commits sin is a slave to sin (8:34). No confessions required out loud, but honestly: where in your life are you still calling a chain a choice?
2. Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again. Which half of that sentence do you find harder to accept for yourself, and which half do you find harder to extend to others?

Live It This Week

- **Pray the Name.** Once a day this week, pray the ancient Jesus Prayer slowly, five times: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner. You now know what weight the Name in that sentence carries; pray it like you know.

- **Light one flame.** Light a candle once this week, at church or at home, and pray John 8:12 over one dark situation you carry: I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness. Leave the candle burning a while; let the feast's ceremony become your prayer.
- **Drop one stone.** Name, privately, one person you have been condemning in your heart. Every day this week, pray for them by name, and end with the Lord's sentence about yourself: neither do I condemn you. Stones get heavy; set yours down.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus Christ, light of the world, fountain of living water, I AM before Abraham was: we have heard your Name tonight and we do not shrug. We bring you our chains that we have been calling choices, our stones that we have been calling justice, our thirst that we have been watering from broken wells. Say over each of us what you said to her: neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again. And keep us near you until your Hour. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 8, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **Leviticus 23:33-43** · leader background, the institution of Tabernacles
- **John 7:1-13** · opening reading, the brothers, the secret ascent, the fractured verdicts
- **John 7:25-32** · the failed arrest; verse 30, the Hour as shield; the board moment
- **John 7:37-39** · the water cry on the great day; John's gloss naming the Spirit; not yet glorified
- **Isaiah 12:3 and Zechariah 14:8** · leader reads Isaiah 12:3 aloud; the water ceremony's songs
- **John 7:40-52** · the fractures, Nicodemus' second appearance, the experts' sloppy search
- **2 Kings 14:25** · one-line irony, Jonah of Gath-hepher in Galilee
- **John 7:53-8:11** · the woman caught in adultery; textual footnote honesty, canonical confidence, the two inseparable clauses
- **John 8:12-20** · light of the world in the treasury; second predicate I AM; the Hour shield repeats (8:20)
- **Exodus 13:21** · leader background, the pillar of fire behind the candelabras
- **John 8:21-30** · unless you believe that I am he (RSV2CE; the Greek a bare egō eimi) (8:24); the second lifted up saying fused with the Name (8:28)
- **John 8:31-36** · Dig Deeper, the truth will make you free, slavery to sin
- **John 8:48-59** · the summit: Abraham rejoiced, before Abraham was I AM, the stones, the hidden exit
- **Exodus 3:13-15** · live discovery, I AM WHO I AM; the reserve text deployed at last
- **Isaiah 43:10-13** · live discovery, the courtroom egō eimi of the Greek Old Testament
- **Leviticus 24:16** · quick reference, stoning for blasphemy of the Name
- **John 9:9** · steelman reference, the beggar's ordinary egō eimi; handled in the press
- **CCC 206-207, 211, 590, 748, 1846-1848** · Catechism connections

The Light and the Shepherd

John 9-10 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover John's great double portrait: a man born blind who gains his sight and then, under four interrogations, grows step by step into worship, while the men who claim to see argue themselves stone blind; and the Shepherd of Ezekiel 34 arriving in person to gather the sheep his hirelings cast out, laying down his life for them by his own free choice.

Catholic Touchstone: Baptismal illumination and the freedom of the cross. The Church has always read John 9 as baptismal catechesis, anointing, washing in the pool called Sent, and coming back seeing, and still proclaims it at the Lenten scrutinies of those preparing for Baptism (CCC 1216). And John 10:18 is the Church's charter text on the cross as a free act: no one takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own accord (CCC 609).

What You Need to Know

Chapter 9 opens with the disciples doing theology over a beggar's head: Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? The question assumes the airtight bookkeeping of retribution, every suffering traceable to a specific sin, and Jesus dismantles it in a sentence: it was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. He does not explain suffering; he repurposes it. Then the method: he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay. The Word who made all things stoops and works in mud, and every reader of Genesis should feel the echo: the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground (Genesis 2:7). St. Irenaeus read it exactly so: the same Hands that fashioned Adam from clay are fashioning eyes from clay, supplying openly what was left unfinished in the womb, the Creator signing his work. Then the command: go, wash in the pool of Siloam, and John steps out of the narrative to translate: which means Sent. The Sent One (the Gospel's favorite title for Jesus, sent by the Father, dozens of times) heals through washing in the pool named Sent. Anointing, water, obedience, illumination: the Fathers could not read this chapter without seeing the font, Augustine most bluntly of all, and the Church still hands this Gospel to her catechumens at the Lenten scrutinies. Note the shape for your group without over-allegorizing: matter, word, washing, sight. That shape has a name.

What follows is the longest sustained comedy in the Gospel, and it is structured as a trial that runs in reverse. Four interrogations: the neighbors, the Pharisees, the parents, the Pharisees again, and across them two trajectories cross like an X. The blind man's christology grows one step per grilling: the man called Jesus (9:11), he is a prophet (9:17), if this man were not from God, he could do nothing (9:33), and finally, Lord, I believe, and he worshiped him (9:38). The authorities, meanwhile, argue themselves backward from we know into incoherence, and their verdict on the most transparent miracle in the Gospel is to excommunicate the evidence: they cast him out. Mark the Greek word hovering over the parents, *apodynamōgos*, put out of the synagogue: the grave exclusion that made them duck the question about their own son. Discipleship in John has a price tag, and chapter 9 prints it. The man's courtroom

performance is a gift to every believer without a theology degree: one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see. Testimony, like the Samaritan woman's, is the unanswerable argument. And do not miss the tenderness of the ending: Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him, having gone looking for the man his healing had cost so much, he completes the man's sight: do you believe in the Son of Man? The man worships, *prosekynēsen*, and Jesus receives the prostration without deflecting it, a quiet datum to file beside the loud ones (contrast Revelation 19:10). The chapter's verdict inverts everything: for judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind. The only incurable blindness in John is the kind that says we see.

Chapter 10 begins with truly, truly, no scene change: the Good Shepherd discourse is Jesus' commentary on what the authorities just did to the healed man, and its Old Testament engine is Ezekiel 34, tonight's central live discovery. Ezekiel indicts the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves, who dominate the flock and cast out the weak, and then God makes a double promise that no ordinary reading can hold together: I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, God in person, and, I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, the messianic king. God himself, and the Davidic servant, one shepherding. John 10 is the only place the two halves meet: the divine I AM who is also the son of David, standing in the temple, watching Ezekiel's hirelings throw a healed sheep out the door. Two new predicate I AMs for the board: I am the door of the sheep (10:7, 9), the one legitimate entrance, and I am the good shepherd (10:11, 14), where good is *kalos*, good, noble, beautiful, the shepherd worth dying with. And the discourse's drumbeat is the phrase lays down his life, sounding five times across 10:11, 15, 17 and twice in 18, climaxing in the sentence that advances the Hour thread further than anything yet: no one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again (10:18). The group discovered last week that the plot waits on the Hour; tonight they hear why from Jesus' own mouth: the cross will be neither accident nor defeat but the freest act ever performed (CCC 609). And 10:16 widens the horizon: other sheep, not of this fold; one flock, one shepherd; the Samaritan harvest of chapter 4 already hints who is coming, and the world is next.

The scene shifts to the feast of the Dedication, Hanukkah, in winter, on Solomon's portico (10:22-23), and here is a quiet gift of the Catholic canon worth one gentle sentence: the origin of this feast, the Maccabean rededication of the temple, is recorded in 1 Maccabees 4, in the books preserved in the Catholic Old Testament. The authorities demand plainness, how long will you keep us in suspense?, and receive more than they asked: I and the Father are one (10:30). The Greek is precise and your teaching must be too: *hen*, neuter, one thing, not *heis*, one person. The sentence is Trinitarian grammar in embryo: distinct persons (I and the Father), one being (are one), guarding simultaneously against Arius (two beings) and against collapsing Father and Son into one person. The stones come out again (the first attempt was 8:59), and the charge is stated with courtroom precision: not for a good work do we stone you but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God (10:33). File the triple witness: 5:18, 8:58-59, 10:30-33, two stated charges and the stones' own verdict, never once corrected by Jesus or the narrator. Jesus' Psalm 82 reply (if Scripture called corrupt judges gods, how much less is it blasphemy for the one whom the Father consecrated and sent to say, I am the Son of God) is rabbinic argument from the lesser to the greater: it silences the stones without withdrawing a syllable, and he immediately escalates, the Father is in me and I am in the Father (10:38), and they try to arrest him again, and again he passes from their hands (10:39). Prepare the steelman on 10:30 carefully; its strongest text is John 17, and your group deserves it whole.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Ezekiel 34:1-16, 23.** The indictment of the shepherds who feed themselves, and the double promise: I myself will shepherd, and my servant David will shepherd. The central live discovery.
- **Genesis 2:7.** The LORD God formed man of dust from the ground. Read aloud over the clay of 9:6; the Creator's signature.
- **Psalms 23 and Psalm 82:6.** The LORD is my shepherd (leader background), and you are gods (cited by Jesus in the text; know the a fortiori shape of his reply).
- **2 Samuel 5:2 and Micah 5:2-4.** The shepherd-king promised to David's line. Leader background for the double fulfillment.
- **1 Maccabees 4:36-59.** The rededication of the temple: the origin of the feast of 10:22, preserved in the Catholic canon. One gentle sentence in session.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-202), *Against Heresies* 5.15

Irenaeus reads the clay on the blind man's eyes as the Creator's signature: the same Hands that formed man from the dust in the beginning here form eyes from clay, openly supplying what had been left unfinished in the womb. The healing is not only mercy; it is identification. The man who stooped to the mud at Siloam is the God who stooped to the mud in Eden, finishing on a sabbath the work his own fingers began.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), *Doctor of the Church*, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 44

Augustine will not let the pool's name pass as trivia: the man washed his eyes in the pool that is interpreted Sent, which is to say, Augustine tells his flock, he was baptized in Christ. Anointed, sent to the water, washed, and returned seeing: the blind man is every catechumen, and the chapter is among the Church's oldest pictures of what the font does. He was enlightened, and the Church long ago learned to call Baptism illumination.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Gregory the Great (c. 540-604), *Doctor of the Church*, *Homilies on the Gospels*, Homily 14

Preaching on the Good Shepherd as pope, Gregory refuses to let the title stay decorative: the shepherd proved his love, he says, by the only proof that cannot be counterfeited, he laid down his life for his sheep, and the hireling is exposed not by his title but by what he does when the wolf comes. Then Gregory turns the discourse on his own clergy; and every believer can hear it after him: we shepherd some corner of life, a family, a friendship, a responsibility; whose example do we follow when protecting the flock begins to cost?

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1216.** Baptism is called enlightenment: having received the Word, the true light, the baptized are illuminated. The Church's name for what happened at Siloam.

- **CCC 754.** The Church is the sheepfold whose one and necessary door is Christ, the flock of which God himself foretold that he would be the shepherd, citing this chapter.
- **CCC 609.** Jesus freely laid down his life in an act of perfect love: no one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. The cross as freedom, not fate.
- **CCC 242.** The Son is consubstantial with the Father, one in being: Nicaea's word for what the Church reads 10:30 to assert once the verse is taken in its full context; hen by itself means one thing, not one person, and the context supplies the rest.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

The seven signs tally. The drought ends: Sign 6, the man born blind. The traditional count now needs only one more before the cross, and the group may begin speculating about what could top sight for the born-blind. Confirm nothing.

I AM. Two new predicates: the door (10:7, 9) and the good shepherd (10:11, 14). The board now reads: bread, light, door, shepherd. The sentence I AM the ___ is visibly structuring the Gospel; let the group say so themselves.

Light and darkness (MASTERPIECE). Chapter 9 is the thread's great inversion: the blind see and the seeing go blind, and the only incurable blindness is we see (9:41). Name the inversion on the board.

The Hour and the death plot. Mega-advance at 10:18: the appointment is free; no one takes my life, I lay it down of my own accord. And the plot fires twice more, stones at 10:31 and an arrest attempt at 10:39, and twice more closes on air.

The triple witness of enemies. Log the set as a set: 5:18, 8:58-59, 10:30-33. Two spoken charges and one shower of stones, you make yourself God, and never a correction. In a Gospel that so loves to correct, the silence speaks.

Sign-faith versus real faith. The thread's positive exemplar arrives: set the two healed men side by side, the paralytic of chapter 5 who never sought Jesus and told the authorities, and the blind man who grew one step per interrogation into worship. Same healer, opposite trajectories; grace does not bulldoze.

One flock, one shepherd. The bride thread's pastoral key change: 10:16, other sheep, not of this fold. The gathering that began at a Samaritan well is going global.

The Lamb (sealed). Leader knowledge only: the study named for the Lamb has just spent an evening with the Shepherd who lays down his life. The two figures are converging. Say absolutely nothing; Session 13 is close now.

Session Goals

1. Participants can trace the blind man's four-step growth in christology under pressure, and the authorities' mirror descent into blindness.
2. Participants recognize the baptismal shape of Siloam, anointing, water, obedience, illumination, and connect it to CCC 1216 and the Lenten scrutinies.

3. Participants discover Ezekiel 34's double promise and can explain why only Jesus can fulfill both halves at once.
4. Participants can state from 10:18 why the cross is a free act, and connect it to the Hour thread's appointment language.
5. Participants hear the strongest unity-of-purpose reading of 10:30 and weigh it against the hand parallel, the neuter hen, the charge at 10:33, and John 17 read whole.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 12 minutes. Build, 60 minutes. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 18 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: Build question 3 on the parents (fold aposynagōgos into question 4 in one sentence), the Dig Deeper on the two healed men (assign it as the week's pondering instead), and the 1 Maccabees note (one sentence maximum anyway). Do not cut: the Genesis 2:7 reading over the clay, the Ezekiel 34 discovery, 10:18, or the steelman. The four interrogations can be read in two blocks rather than four to save minutes.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, light of the world, you found a man blind from birth and finished with your own hands the work your hands began. Put your fingers on our eyes tonight. Show us where we have been saying we see. And when the wolf comes near anyone in this room this week, be for us what you promised: the good shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. Have you ever had to keep telling the same true story while people tried to talk you out of it? How did you hold your ground?
2. Who has been a shepherd figure in your life, someone who protected you at real cost to themselves? What did it cost them?

Transition: Tonight one beggar receives his sight, and then has to defend it through four interrogations. Watch two lines cross: as he sees more and more, the men who say we see go blinder and blinder.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 9:1-7 aloud. Then ask:

Question 1. Start with the disciples' question: who sinned, this man or his parents? What theology hides inside it, and what does Jesus do to that theology? Then the method: why mud, of all things? Leader, read Genesis 2:7 aloud over verse 6. And catch John's footnote in verse 7: what does he stop to translate, and why might that matter? Log the sign.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The question assumes airtight retribution: every suffering must be somebody's fault, so assign it. Jesus refuses the whole calculus: neither, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. He does not explain the suffering; he repurposes it, which is both less than we want and more. The mud: the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and here the Word made flesh stoops and works in clay again, finishing eyes the womb left unfinished, the Creator signing his work, as St. Irenaeus loved to say. And John halts the story to tell us Siloam means Sent: the Sent One heals through washing in the pool named Sent. Anointing, water, obedience, and a man comes back seeing: hold that shape, matter, word, washing, illumination, because the Church has a name for it, and she still reads this exact chapter to her catechumens in Lent. Log Sign 6; the drought is over.

Question 2. Read 9:8-17. First two interrogations, neighbors and Pharisees. Track the healed man's answers about Jesus: what does he call him in verse 11, and what has he become by verse 17? And note the authorities' problem in verse 16: what splits them?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Verse 11: the man called Jesus, bare acquaintance with a name. Verse 17: he is a prophet, one step up, taken under pressure. His christology is growing one interrogation at a time, and the pressure is the fertilizer. The authorities split on an unresolvable syllogism: this man is not from God, for he

does not keep the sabbath, against, how can a man who is a sinner do such signs? The schisma word appears again; the middle keeps collapsing, now inside the leadership itself.

Question 3. Read 9:18-23. The parents confirm the miracle and duck the meaning: he is of age, ask him. John tells us exactly why. What is the threat, and what does it tell us about the price of confessing Jesus in this Gospel?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The threat is *aposynagōgos*: anyone confessing Jesus as Christ was to be put out of the synagogue, which in that world meant grave religious and social exclusion. The parents look at their seeing son and calculate the cost, and the cost wins. John prints discipleship's price tag in the middle of the miracle story on purpose: sight is free; saying who gave it to you is not. Every generation of the Church has its *aposynagōgos*, and the group can probably name this generation's versions.

Question 4. Read 9:24-34, the best courtroom scene in the Gospel. The authorities open with a verdict (give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner) and demand he sign it. Read his answer in verse 25 aloud; why is it unanswerable? Then enjoy verses 27-33: who is teaching whom by the end, and what do the teachers do when they lose?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see. He refuses the theology exam and stands on testimony, and testimony cannot be cross-examined out of a man; the Samaritan woman won her town with the same weapon. By verses 30-33 the beggar is lecturing the theologians on their own principles, why, this is a marvel! you do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes, and lands a syllogism they cannot break: if this man were not from God, he could do nothing. Their reply is the argument of the beaten: you were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?, the very retribution theology Jesus demolished in verse 3, followed by the bad shepherd's last resort: they cast him out. Excommunicating the evidence. Remember who threw this sheep out of the pen; the next chapter is about them.

Question 5. Read 9:35-41. Notice the first verb: Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him. What does that seeking tell you? Watch what the man does at verse 38 and, crucially, what Jesus does not do. Then weigh the chapter's closing verdict: what is the only blindness this Gospel treats as incurable? And set this man beside the healed paralytic of chapter 5: same healer, what different endings?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The Shepherd goes looking for the sheep his healing cost so much: the man was expelled for Jesus before he even knew fully who Jesus was, and Jesus does not leave him in the street. Then the completion of his sight: do you believe in the Son of Man?... Lord, I believe, and he worshiped him, and Jesus receives it without the deflection Scripture's angels characteristically supply (Revelation 19:10), a quiet datum beside the loud ones. The verdict: for judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind. If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, we see, your guilt remains. The only incurable blindness is the kind that has declared itself sighted; every other kind he can heal with mud. And the comparison:

the paralytic of chapter 5 never sought Jesus, and went and told the authorities; the blind man grew a step per interrogation into worship. Same grace, opposite responses. Log both on the sign-faith line; grace does not bulldoze, and the two healed men prove it in stereo.

Question 6 (live discovery). Chapter 10 opens truly, truly, with no scene change: Jesus is still talking to the men who just threw the sheep out. His words have an engine underneath them. Send the group to Ezekiel 34 and read verses 1-6, 10-16, and 23. Three questions: what are Israel's shepherds indicted for? What does God promise to do about it, and listen closely, who does God say will do the shepherding? Count the answers.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The indictment: shepherds feeding themselves, clothing themselves with the wool, ruling with force and harshness, not seeking the strayed, scattering the flock, exactly what the group just watched done to a healed beggar. The promise is the discovery, because it comes in two halves that no ordinary reading can hold together: behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep... I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, God in person, no delegate; and then, I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David; he shall feed them. God himself will shepherd, and the Davidic servant will shepherd, one flock, one shepherding, two impossible-to-combine shepherds, unless. Let the group say the unless themselves. The man standing on Solomon's portico is the only figure in Israel's story who can be both promises at once: the divine I AM, and the son of David. Ezekiel wrote the job description six centuries early, and, the Church confesses, it took two natures to fill it.

Question 7. Read 10:7-18. Two new I AM predicates for the board: name them. Then count a phrase: how many times in these verses does Jesus say some form of lays down his life? And read verse 18 twice, slowly, next to what we learned last week about the Hour. What is Jesus telling us, in advance, about how to read his death when it comes?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

I am the door of the sheep, the one legitimate entrance to the fold, and I am the good shepherd, where good is *kalos*, good, noble, beautiful, the shepherd worth following over a cliff. The laying down of his life tolls five times (10:11, 15, 17, and twice in 18), and verse 18 is the study's biggest single advance on the Hour: no one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. Last week the group learned the plot waits on the Hour; tonight Jesus explains the waiting from the inside: his death will be neither ambush nor tragedy nor miscarriage of justice merely, but the freest act ever performed, love choosing its hour (CCC 609). When the group reaches the Passion, they must read every scene through this verse. And verse 16 quietly throws the pen doors open: other sheep, that are not of this fold... one flock, one shepherd. The Samaritan harvest already whispers; the world is coming.

Question 8. Read 10:22-33. New feast: the Dedication, Hanukkah, in winter, and here is a small treasure: the story of that feast's origin, the Maccabean rededication of the temple, is preserved in 1 Maccabees, in the Catholic Old Testament. They demand plainness and get 10:30: I and the Father are one. Watch the reaction and read the charge in verse 33 verbatim: what exactly do they accuse him of, and where have we seen this movie before?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The stones come out again (the first attempt was 8:59), and the charge is stated with courtroom precision: not for a good work do we stone you but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God. Log the triple witness as a set: 5:18 (making himself equal with God), 8:58-59 (I AM, stones), 10:30-33 (you make yourself God, stones). Two explicit charges (5:18, 10:33) and one reaction whose meaning the stones spell out (8:59), and, in a Gospel so given to correcting misunderstandings, no correction ever comes. The silence is a verdict. But before we rest on it, the other reading of 10:30 deserves its strongest hour, and its best evidence comes from Jesus' own lips later in this Gospel.

Steelman: One in Purpose, Not in Being?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

Here is the strongest form of the unity-of-purpose reading, and its best text is John itself. In chapter 17, Jesus will pray for his disciples that they may be one, even as we are one (17:11, 22), and even, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us (17:21). There is the parallel, the argument runs, from Jesus' own mouth: whatever oneness the Father and Son share, believers can share it too, as we are one. But no one imagines the disciples merging into a single divine essence; their oneness is unity of love, will, and mission. Therefore I and the Father are one at 10:30 means exactly that: perfect agreement, perfect alignment of will, the Son doing always what pleases the Father, a moral and missional unity, magnificent but creaturely available. The stones prove only that the crowd overreacted, as crowds do; and Jesus' Psalm 82 reply, where mere human judges are called gods, shows him talking the claim down, not up. State it at full strength; the John 17 parallel is real, and it is the best card in the deck.

Question 9 (press from the text). Four probes. First, the context nobody quotes: read 10:28-29, the two sentences before verse 30. What can no one do to the sheep in Jesus' hand, and what can no one do to the sheep in the Father's hand, and what kind of oneness does that parallel require? Second, the grammar: the Greek says *hen*, neuter, one thing, not *heis*, one person; what does that precision protect on both sides? Third, the Psalm 82 reply: does Jesus retract, and what does he say next, in verse 38? Fourth, the John 17 parallel: read the little word as carefully; what kind of comparison does it make?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

First, the hand parallel: no one shall snatch them out of my hand... no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand, and then, I and the Father are one. The oneness verse 30 asserts is the oneness the argument needs: one omnipotent grip. Agreement cannot make two hands equally un snatchable; only one almighty power held in common can, and omnipotence is not a committee resolution. Verse 30 is the conclusion of a power claim, not a mission statement. Second, the neuter *hen* is exact: one thing, not one person, and the context has just told us what kind of thing, one un snatchable hand, guarding against Arius on one side (two beings) and against collapsing the Father and Son into a single person on the other. Distinct persons, one being: the Council of Nicaea's consubstantial (CCC 242) is the Church's dogmatic reading of this verse in its full context. Third, the Psalm 82 reply is rabbinic argument from the lesser to the greater: if Scripture could call corrupt human judges gods without blasphemy, how much less blasphemous for the one whom the Father

consecrated and sent to say, I am the Son of God. It silences the stones without surrendering an inch, and Jesus immediately escalates: the Father is in me and I am in the Father (10:38), mutual indwelling, at which they try to seize him again. A man talking his claim down does not restate it larger. Fourth, the as of John 17 marks analogy, not identity of mode, and the Fathers said it precisely: believers are one by participation and grace, sharing derivatively in a unity whose original is natural and essential; the Father and Son are one by nature. A family photo can be like its subjects without being them. The 17:21 prayer is in fact the Catholic doctrine of grace in miniature: we are drawn up into a oneness we could never constitute, which is only good news if the original oneness is more than a well-run partnership. The hand that no one can snatch from is the reading; his hostile hearers, for the third time in the set and the second time with stones in hand, heard him correctly.

DIG DEEPER

The two healed men. For the week's pondering: set chapter 5 and chapter 9 side by side like a diptych. Both were long helpless; both were healed on a sabbath, by a word or a touch of mud; both were interrogated by the same authorities. One never sought his healer, and went and told the authorities; the other defended him through four grillings, was cast out for him, and ended on his knees. Same grace, opposite endings. The difference was not in the gift. The question the diptych leaves on your doorstep: which panel are you living in?

Synthesis question. Chapter 9 ends with a blind man worshiping and seeing men blind; chapter 10 ends with stones answering I and the Father are one. Put it in one sentence: what happens when the light of the world actually arrives somewhere?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

It divides. Light does not negotiate with darkness; it reveals what everything already was, and the revelation sorts the room: the beggar who knew he was blind walks out seeing, and the experts who knew they saw walk out blind, and the same sun does both. Judgment in John is not primarily a gavel at the end of time; it is what happens to hearts in the presence of the light, now. And through the sorted crowd moves the Shepherd, gathering, calling by name, going after the ones the hirelings threw out, with the price of the gathering already announced and freely accepted: the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The light divides; the shepherd gathers; and both are the same person, and his Hour is getting close.

Send

1. The blind man's testimony grew under pressure; the parents ducked. When your faith comes up at work, online, or at a family table, which are you closer to, honestly, and what is your aposynagōgos, the cost you are calculating?
2. My sheep hear my voice (10:27). What voices are actually loudest in your week, and what would it take for his to become recognizable in the noise?

Live It This Week

- **Write your one thing.** The blind man's whole apologetic was one sentence: one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see. Write your own version, one sentence, what he has actually done in your life, and say it out loud once a day until it stops feeling strange. That sentence is your Siloam testimony, and someday someone will need to hear it.
- **Train your ear.** Sheep learn the shepherd's voice by exposure, not by studying acoustics. Ten minutes a day this week with John 10 open: read a few verses, be quiet, read them again. Voice recognition is built exactly this slowly, and exactly this surely.
- **Renew your illumination.** John 9 is one of the Church's oldest pictures of Baptism: anointed, washed, sent, seeing. Next time you enter a church, stop at the font, sign yourself slowly, and pray the blind man's three words: Lord, I believe. You were enlightened once; let the water remind your eyes.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, good shepherd, you found the man they cast out, and you find us. We confess every we see we have ever said; heal the blindness we did not know we had. Teach our ears your voice among the voices. And as your Hour draws near in this Gospel, teach us to read everything that is coming by your own word: no one takes your life from you; you lay it down of your own accord, for the sheep, for us. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 10:11

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 9, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 9:1-7** · opening reading, who sinned, the clay, Siloam which means Sent; Sign 6
- **Genesis 2:7** · leader reads aloud, formed from the dust; the Creator's signature
- **John 9:8-17** · first interrogations, the man called Jesus, a prophet, the schisma
- **John 9:18-23** · the parents, aposynagōgos, the price tag
- **John 9:24-34** · one thing I know, the beggar teaches the theologians, cast out
- **John 9:35-41** · Jesus finds him, worship accepted, the inversion verdict
- **Ezekiel 34:1-6, 10-16, 23** · live discovery, the bad shepherds and the double promise
- **John 10:1-6** · the figure: thieves, the door, the voice; continuous with chapter 9
- **John 10:7-18** · the door and the good shepherd; lays down his life five times; 10:16 one flock; 10:18 of my own accord
- **Psalms 23, 2 Samuel 5:2, Micah 5:2-4** · leader background, the shepherd-king
- **John 10:22-33** · Hanukkah, I and the Father are one, the stones, the charge verbatim
- **1 Maccabees 4:36-59** · one gentle sentence, the feast's origin in the Catholic canon
- **Psalms 82:6** · cited by Jesus in the text; know the lesser-to-greater shape
- **John 10:34-39** · the reply, the escalation at 10:38, the failed arrest
- **John 17:11, 21-22** · steelman text, that they may be one as we are one; handled in the press
- **CCC 242, 609, 754, 1216** · Catechism connections

The Resurrection and the Life

John 11-12 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that the seventh sign completes their tally and signs Jesus' death warrant in the same stroke: the giver of life is sentenced for giving it. They watch the Hour turn at last, from not yet to has come, triggered of all things by Greeks asking to see Jesus, and they hear the third lifted up saying close its thread: and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.

Catholic Touchstone: I am the resurrection and the life. The resurrection is not first an event but a person (CCC 994), and Lazarus is the pledge. And in Jesus' tears at the tomb, the Church's full doctrine of his humanity: true God, truly weeping, and legitimizing every Christian's grief forever.

What You Need to Know

Chapter 11 opens with the most shocking so in the Gospel: now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was (11:5-6). Not although he loved them, but because; the delay is inside the love, not against it. Prepare to sit with your group in that sentence, because everyone in the room owns a delay they are still holding against God. Jesus names the stakes early: this illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, and the glory thread begins tonight to fuse with everything else. Note also a small gift for your Session 7 file: when the disciples take Lazarus has fallen asleep literally, Jesus corrects them plainly, Lazarus is dead (11:14). The misunderstanding pattern's signature, correction, holds everywhere in this Gospel except one discourse in Capernaum. And Thomas gets his first line: let us also go, that we may die with him (11:16), loyal, gloomy, and worth remembering for the study's final session.

By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has been in the tomb four days, a detail with teeth: later Jewish tradition spoke of the soul lingering near the body for three days; four days means unambiguously, irreversibly dead. Both sisters greet him with the identical sentence, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, grief's oldest arithmetic. Martha adds a brave and orthodox future tense, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day, and Jesus corrects her tense: I AM the resurrection and the life (11:25), the fifth predicate on your board. The resurrection is not a doctrine scheduled for the last day; it is a person standing in front of her at this one. Her reply is the fullest confession any human being has made in this Gospel so far: yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world (11:27), and file this for yourself: her exact creed will matter enormously in our final session. A woman gives this Gospel its central confession; Peter's counterpart came at Capernaum, Martha's comes at a tomb.

Then the two words: Jesus wept (11:35). Do not let their brevity make them small. The Greek around them is violent: *enebrimēsato* (11:33, 38), he was deeply moved, snorted with indignation, the word for a war-horse's bristling. Jesus stands at his friend's tomb knowing exactly what he is about to do, and still he shudders with anger and weeps because, as the Church has long heard these tears, death is an enemy, an intruder in his Father's world, and he will not greet it politely even while defeating it. St. Ambrose

built the Church's theology of grief on this verse: Christians weep, Christ wept first, and hope does not anesthetize love. Then the tomb: take away the stone; Martha's horribly practical protest about the odor; the prayer aloud, Father, I thank you that you have heard me, thanksgiving preceding the gift, which the Catechism analyzes as the very model of Jesus' prayer (CCC 2604); and the cry: Lazarus, come out. Your board has been waiting for this since Session 6: the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God (5:25, 28). At Bethany the group hears the preview performance. The dead man came out, and the command that follows belongs to the Church forever: unbind him, and let him go. Augustine heard in it the Lord's division of labor that still stands: Christ raises, and hands what he has raised to his people to be unbound, the ministry of loosing the Church exercises in every absolution. Log Sign 7. The tally is complete, and the seventh sign is life from the dead.

And the seventh sign signs the death warrant. The Sanhedrin convenes in panic, if we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and Caiaphas the high priest delivers the Gospel's supreme irony: it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish (11:50). He means cynical politics; John steps forward with the gloss: he did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad (11:51-52). The high priest of Israel, in the act of plotting the death, pronounces the doctrine of the death: one for the many, and the gathering of the scattered, the one flock of 10:16 announced from the enemy's own chair. So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death: the plot is now formal policy. And 11:55: now the Passover of the Jews was at hand. The third and final Passover. Your sealed guesses are one narrative week from maturity. Say nothing, and feel everything.

Chapter 12 is a week of hinges. At Bethany, Mary breaks a pound of pure nard, three hundred denarii, a laborer's year, over Jesus' feet and wipes them with her hair, and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment: the house that so recently feared the smell of a four-day tomb now fills with the scent of extravagant love. Judas objects with an accountant's piety, and John's aside is acid: he was a thief. Jesus' defense reframes everything: let her keep it for the day of my burial. She has anointed a body. Then the entry: palm branches, Psalm 118's Hosanna, and the colt of Zechariah 9:9, tonight's live discovery, the king who comes humble and riding on a donkey, victorious precisely in lowliness. And then the strangest trigger in the Gospel: some Greeks, Gentile worshipers or Greek-speaking God-fearers, at the feast, ask Philip, sir, we wish to see Jesus, and at that news Jesus says the sentence your board has waited nine sessions to flip: the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified (12:23). Why the Greeks? Because Caiaphas prophesied a gathering of the scattered, and the shepherd promised other sheep, and when the nations start arriving at the door, the mechanism of the harvest must engage: unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit (12:24).

John gives us his Gethsemane standing up in public: now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour (12:27), the Hour and the freedom of 10:18 in one breath, answered by the Father's voice from heaven. Then the summit sentence of the chapter: now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself (12:31-32), the third lifted up saying, completing the thread, with John's gloss nailing it down: he said this to show by what death he was to die. Gold for your own preparation: Isaiah 52:13, the verse that opens the suffering servant song, reads in the Greek Bible, behold, my servant... shall be lifted up and glorified, the exact two verbs, lifted up and glorified, that John has fused into his theology of the cross. And notice whom John quotes when he summarizes the unbelief (12:38): Lord, who has believed our report?, which is Isaiah 53:1, the opening

line of the servant song itself. The evangelist is now quoting from the immediate neighborhood of a certain verse about a lamb led to the slaughter. Do not name it. The seal holds one more week. The hardening quotation from Isaiah 6 that follows (12:39-40) is where tonight's steelman lives; prepare it with both rigor and pastoral care, because they could not believe is a sentence that has kept people up at night for centuries. The public ministry then closes with a final cry (12:44-50), and the Book of Signs ends. When your group walks out tonight, the door of the public ministry shuts behind them.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Zechariah 9:9.** Rejoice greatly... your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass. Live discovery at the entry.
- **Psalms 118:25-26.** Save us, we beseech you, O LORD (118:25); blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD (118:26), the plea John's Hosanna transliterates. Cited in the text; the pilgrim psalm of the feast.
- **Isaiah 52:13.** My servant shall be lifted up and glorified (Greek Old Testament): the two verbs of John's cross theology, opening the servant song. Leader may read aloud at the third lifted up saying.
- **Isaiah 53:1 and Isaiah 6:10.** Quoted by John at 12:38-40: the servant song's first line, and the hardening sentence from Isaiah's call. The steelman's home address.
- **1 Kings 17:17-24 and 2 Kings 4:32-37.** Elijah and Elisha raising the dead: prostrations, effort, prayer. Leader background contrast: Jesus raises by a word, at a distance of four days.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Ambrose of Milan (c. 339-397), Doctor of the Church, On the Death of His Brother Satyrus

Preaching at his own brother's funeral, Ambrose defends his tears with the Gospel's shortest verse: we have not incurred any grievous sin by weeping, for Jesus wept. He wept, Ambrose says, for one not bound to him by blood, and he wept knowing he was about to raise him; therefore hope does not forbid grief, it accompanies it. The Lord's tears legitimize ours forever: Christians do not grieve less than others, we grieve with a horizon.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Doctor of the Church, Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 49

Augustine lingers on the division of labor at the tomb: Christ alone cries the dead man out, for only God raises the dead; but the risen man comes out still bound, and the unbinding is given to the disciples: unbind him, and let him go. So it remains, Augustine says: the Lord raises the soul dead in sin by his own voice, and hands the raised to his Church to be loosed, the ministry of absolution she has exercised ever since. Grace raises; the Church unbinds; and the man walks free by both.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-107), bishop and martyr, Letter to the Romans 4

On the road to his execution, Ignatius begged the Roman Christians not to rescue him, and reached for tonight's image to explain why: I am the wheat of God; let me be ground by the teeth of the wild

beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. The grain of wheat saying was not poetry to him; it was his itinerary. Unless it falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone: Ignatius chose the falling, and the Church he fed is still eating the fruit.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 994.** Jesus links faith in the resurrection to his own person: I am the Resurrection and the life; and he gives its sign and pledge by restoring some of the dead to life, announcing his own Resurrection, though it was to be of another order.
- **CCC 2604.** The Catechism's analysis of the prayer at Lazarus' tomb: thanksgiving precedes the event, Father, I thank you for having heard me, because the Father is the giver before the gift is seen. The model of Jesus' prayer, and of ours.
- **CCC 607.** The desire to embrace the Father's plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus' whole life, for his redemptive passion was the very reason for his Incarnation: and what shall I say, Father save me from this hour? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour.
- **CCC 605.** Christ died for all without exception: there is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer. Ammunition for tonight's steelman press, alongside CCC 1037: God predestines no one to hell.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

The seven signs tally (COMPLETE). Sign 7: Lazarus. Make the ceremony real: the tally the group has kept since Cana closes tonight, and the seventh sign is resurrection. Then name the irony once: the sign of life is what triggers the formal sentence of death (11:53). Giving life costs him his.

The Hour (TURNS). The board's biggest single moment: at 12:23 the drumbeat changes from not yet to the hour has come, and 12:27 confirms the freedom: for this purpose I have come to this hour. Flip the line visibly. Everything from here is inside the Hour.

Lifted up (COMPLETE). Third saying, 12:32, with John's own gloss: to show by what death he was to die. The thread closes: 3:14, 8:28, 12:32. And it has fused with glory: glorified and lifted up are Isaiah 52:13's two verbs for the servant. The cross is the exaltation.

I AM. Fifth predicate: I am the resurrection and the life (11:25). The board reads: bread, light, door, shepherd, resurrection.

The voice of the Son of God (PAYS OFF). The 5:25-28 promise gets its preview performance at Bethany: a dead man hears the voice and comes out. Name the connection; the group planted it four sessions ago.

The gathering. Three beats in two chapters: Caiaphas's unwitting prophecy of gathering the scattered (11:52), the Greeks arriving (12:20), and draw all men to myself (12:32). The one flock of 10:16 is assembling, and its arrival is what strikes the Hour.

The betrayal. Judas at Bethany (12:4-6), objecting to love with an accountant's piety, and John's aside: he was a thief. The line darkens; next session it goes to night.

Passover and the Lamb (sealed, FINAL WEEK). The third Passover is at hand (11:55), and John's unbelief summary quotes the first line of Isaiah 53, the servant song, the neighborhood of a verse about a lamb led to slaughter. Leader knowledge only. The guesses mature in Session 13. Guard the seal with your life.

Thomas. Let us also go, that we may die with him (11:16). Loyal, dark-minded, and unforgettable. Plant only; the far end is the study's last session.

Session Goals

1. Participants can articulate why the delay is inside the love, and own their version of if you had been here.
2. Participants register the fifth predicate I AM, hear Martha's confession as the Gospel's fullest so far, and see the 5:25 promise pay off at the tomb.
3. Participants complete the sign tally, and can state the irony: the seventh sign triggers the death sentence.
4. Participants watch the Hour turn at 12:23 and can explain why the Greeks are the trigger, and how the grain of wheat is the mechanism.
5. Participants hear the strongest decree reading of they could not believe, and weigh it against 12:42, 12:32, the Johannine order of rejection, and CCC 605 and 1037.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 12 minutes. Build, 60 minutes. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 18 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: the Elijah and Elisha contrast (one sentence), Build question 7's discussion of Psalm 118 (name the psalm and move), and the Dig Deeper on the two anointing smells. Do not cut: the delay of 11:5-6, Jesus wept, the tomb scene with the tally completion, Caiaphas, the 12:23 turn, or the steelman. Two chapters, many hinges; keep the readings brisk and the silences where they belong, at the tomb and at the turn.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, resurrection and life, you stood at the tomb of a friend and wept, and then you called him by name and death let go. We bring you tonight our griefs, our delays, our four-day situations that smell beyond hope. Call us by name. And as your Hour turns in this Gospel, turn our hearts with it. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. Have you ever lived through a delay, an answer, a diagnosis, a door opening, that only made sense much later? Has it finished making sense?
2. What is the most extravagant, uncalculated gift you have ever seen someone give? What did the calculators in the room say?

Transition: Tonight the tally you have kept since a wedding in Cana closes, the Hour you have tracked since the same wedding turns, and the public ministry of Jesus ends. Pencils ready.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 11:1-16 aloud. Then ask:

Question 1. Read verses 5 and 6 again, slowly, and do not soften the conjunction: Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, SO he stayed two days longer. What does that so do to our assumptions about love and delay? Two smaller catches: when the disciples take fallen asleep literally, what does Jesus do, and why does that matter to a certain argument we had in Session 7? And mark Thomas' line.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The delay is not despite the love; it is inside it. Jesus is not detained; he waits on purpose, because he intends a gift larger than the one requested, and the two days are the price of the glory (11:4, 40). This does not make delays painless, and the chapter will not pretend it does; it makes them meaningful, which is different. The sleep correction: Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus is dead, the misunderstanding pattern's signature working exactly as always, correction, which quietly re-confirms our Session 7 finding: the one place the signature ever broke was Capernaum, and it broke by escalation. And Thomas: let us also go, that we may die with him, loyal and gloomy in one breath. Write his name in the margin; this study has an appointment with him.

Question 2. Read 11:17-27. Four days: the detail has teeth (tradition spoke of three days' lingering). Martha meets Jesus with grief's oldest sentence, and then answers his promise with perfectly orthodox future tense: I know that he will rise again... at the last day. Listen to how Jesus corrects her tense. What kind of I AM is this, for the board, and what does it change about what the resurrection is? Then read her reply in verse 27 and weigh it: who has said anything this complete in our whole study?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

I AM the resurrection and the life: the fifth predicate, and the most staggering. Martha believes in the resurrection as a doctrine filed under the last day; Jesus relocates it to the present tense and the

second person: it is not an event on a calendar, it is a person on her doorstep. He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And her confession: yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world, the fullest, most formal confession any human being has made in this Gospel so far, fuller than Peter's at Capernaum, and it comes from a grieving woman at a tomb before the miracle. Remember her exact words; this study will meet them again at the very end, in a sentence about why this Gospel was written at all.

Question 3. Read 11:28-37. Two words, verse 35: Jesus wept. But look also at the word around the tears, translated deeply moved (vv. 33, 38); the Greek is closer to shuddered with indignation, a war-horse word. He knows exactly what he is about to do, and he weeps and bristles anyway. At what? And what does his weeping settle, forever, about grief?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He bristles, tradition has always heard, at death itself: the intruder, the enemy, the thing that was never part of the design, now standing in his friend's doorway making his friends weep. He will not greet it politely even while defeating it; there is anger in the Redeemer at the thing he came to break. And the tears settle the Christian theology of grief for all time, exactly as St. Ambrose preached at his own brother's funeral: we incur no sin by weeping, for Jesus wept, knowing he would raise him within the hour. Hope does not anesthetize love; it gives it a horizon. Anyone in the room grieving anything tonight has just been given permission by God himself, in the shortest verse in the Bible.

Question 4. Read 11:38-44, and let it be slow. Catch four things: Martha's protest at the stone and what Jesus answers; the strange shape of the prayer (what does he do before the gift arrives?); the cry itself, and which promise from Session 6 it previews; and the last command, unbind him, and who it is given to. Then do what we came to do: log the sign.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Martha, practical to the last: Lord, by this time there will be an odor. Jesus: did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God? The stone comes away, and the prayer is thanksgiving in advance, Father, I thank you that you have heard me, gratitude preceding the gift because the Giver is certain before the gift is visible, which the Catechism holds up as the very model of Jesus' prayer and ours (CCC 2604). Then the cry: Lazarus, come out, and a dead man obeys a voice, which is Session 6 paying off before our eyes: the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God (5:25). Bethany is the preview performance. And the last command goes not to Lazarus but to the bystanders: unbind him, and let him go. Augustine heard the Lord's permanent division of labor in it: Christ alone raises the dead, and he hands the raised to his Church to be unbound, the loosing she exercises in every absolution. Now the ceremony: log Sign 7. The tally that opened at a wedding closes at a tomb, and the seventh sign is life from the dead. Leave the board in view; the next reading is going to do something terrible with it.

Question 5. Read 11:45-57. The Sanhedrin convenes over the seventh sign. Listen to Caiaphas' realpolitik in verse 50, and then read John's astonishing gloss in verses 51-52. What did the high priest say, what did the high priest mean, and what, according to John, did the high priest prophesy? And do not miss verse 53 and verse 55: what becomes official, and what feast is at hand?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Caiaphas means cynical arithmetic: better one dead Galilean than Roman legions; it is expedient that one man should die for the people. John's gloss turns the cynicism inside out: being high priest that year, he prophesied, despite himself, that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. The high priest of Israel, in the act of plotting the death, pronounces the theology of the death: one for the many, and the gathering of the scattered, the shepherd's one flock announced from the enemy's own chair. Verse 53 makes the plot formal policy: from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death. And behold the irony your tally board now displays: the seventh sign, the giving of life, is precisely what triggers the sentence of death. He will die for raising the dead. And verse 55: the Passover was at hand, the third and last. Whatever your sealed guess says, it has one narrative week left to wait.

Question 6. Read 12:1-8. Inventory the extravagance: what does the nard cost, where does she put it, what does she wipe it with, and what fills the house? Then the objection: who makes it, how does it sound, and what does John tell us about the objector? And what does Jesus say the anointing is for?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

A pound of pure nard, three hundred denarii, a laborer's entire year, poured not on the head but on the feet, wiped with her unbound hair, an act past all social calculation, and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. Savor John's quiet contrast: days earlier this family feared the odor of a four-day tomb; tonight the house fills with the scent of uncalculated love. Judas objects in the vocabulary of piety, why was this not sold and given to the poor, and John's aside cuts him open: this he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief. Calculation posing as compassion. And Jesus' defense reframes her act entirely: let her keep it for the day of my burial. She has anointed a body. Whether she knew the size of what she was doing, love did; extravagance toward Christ is never waste, and somewhere in the room the betrayal line on your board just darkened.

Question 7 (live discovery). Read 12:12-19: palms, Hosanna, and a young ass. John says the disciples only understood later what they were inside of. Send the group to Zechariah 9:9 and read it aloud. What kind of king did Zechariah promise, and what is the crowd, waving palms at a conqueror, about to get instead?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion... Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass. Not a war-horse: a donkey, the mount of a king who wins by lowliness. The crowd's Hosanna is Psalm 118, the pilgrim psalm, save us now, and their palms are the flag of national triumph; they are cheering the bread king of chapter 6 and the Lazarus-wonder-worker, and the king processing past them intends a victory none of them has priced: triumphant, victorious, and humble, all three at once, within the week. Even the Pharisees preach the truth by accident tonight: you see that you can do nothing; look, the world has gone after him. The world. Hold that word; it is about to knock.

Question 8. Read 12:20-26. Some Greeks, Gentile worshipers or Greek-speaking God-fearers, ask to see Jesus, and at that news, of all news, Jesus says the sentence our board has waited nine sessions for. Say it

aloud together, flip the line, and then answer two questions: why would Greeks arriving be the trigger? And what is the grain of wheat, in verse 24, doing right next to the announcement?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified (12:23). After nine sessions of not yet, at Cana, at Tabernacles, in the treasury, the drumbeat turns. And the trigger is the doorbell: Greeks, the nations' vanguard, sir, we wish to see Jesus. Caiaphas prophesied a gathering of the scattered children of God; the shepherd promised other sheep not of this fold; the Samaritans came first, and now the Greeks are on the porch. When the world starts arriving, the Hour must strike, because the gathering has only one mechanism, and verse 24 states it with agricultural calm: unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. One seed, hoarded, stays one seed; buried, it becomes a harvest. The Greeks cannot truly see Jesus until the grain falls. Flip the Hour line on the board and let the group look at it a moment. Everything left in this Gospel happens inside the Hour.

Question 9. Read 12:27-36. Two things to hold. First, verse 27, John's Gethsemane in broad daylight: what does Jesus admit, what does he refuse to pray, and how does this square with 10:18? Second, verses 31-33: which of our threads just completed, what does John's gloss add, and, leader, read Isaiah 52:13 over the moment. What two verbs has John been fusing all along?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Now is my soul troubled: the dread is real; the freedom is realer. And what shall I say, Father, save me from this hour? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. He looks at the escape hatch and declines it by name, which is 10:18 breathing: no one takes my life; I lay it down of my own accord (CCC 607). Then the completion: and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself, the third and last lifted up saying, and John steps in with the gloss: he said this to show by what death he was to die. The thread closes: 3:14, 8:28, 12:32; the serpent-pole, the revelation of the Name, and now the magnet drawing all. Leader, read Isaiah 52:13 in its Greek rendering: behold, my servant shall be lifted up and glorified. Lifted up, and glorified: the two verbs John has been fusing since Cana are Isaiah's two verbs, and they open the song of the suffering servant. In this Gospel the cross is not the dark before the glory. The cross is the glory. And a note the leader keeps: the very next thing John quotes (12:38) is that song's first line. Say nothing. One week.

Steelman: They Could Not Believe

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

Read 12:37-40 first, and it is genuinely hard: though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him... Therefore they could not believe. For Isaiah again said, He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see... and turn for me to heal them. The Reformed reading takes the verses at maximum strength, and it deserves a fair build. Could not, the argument runs, is inability, not reluctance: these people were not able to believe, and the agent of the blinding is God himself, quoted from Isaiah 6. Faith, on this reading, is given to the elect and withheld from the reprobate by eternal decree; the crowds of the Book of Signs did not believe because it was not granted them to believe, and John says so without flinching. Add 6:44, no one can come to me unless the Father draws him, and 6:65, and the case assembles: salvation is

unconditional election, unbelief is decreed passing-over, and human choice is downstream of both. It is a reading built from real verses, held by serious Christians, and it should be allowed to land with its full weight, including its pastoral weight: on this reading, some people at your table may be unable, by decree, to believe. Let that sit, and then press.

Question 10 (press from the text). Four probes, all from tonight's own chapters. First: read the very next verses, 12:42-43. Who believed, in the same breath as they could not believe, and what does that do to could not as absolute decree? Second: check the Johannine order everywhere we have seen it, 3:19, 9:39-41: which comes first, God's blinding or man's refusal? Third: read 12:32 again, ten verses earlier: whom does the lifted-up Christ intend to draw? Fourth: what does the Church actually teach, in CCC 605 and 1037?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

First, the text presses hard against the absolute reading in its very next sentence: nevertheless many even of the authorities believed in him (12:42), inside the very group allegedly disabled by decree; their problem was not inability but cowardice, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (12:43); and if a Reformed reader answers that such fear-bound belief was not saving faith, the concession still costs the decree reading its universality. Could not, on the Catholic reading, name the moral impossibility of a heart that has hardened itself, not a metaphysical padlock installed at creation. Second, the Johannine order is consistent everywhere the group has traced it: the light comes first, men loved darkness rather than light (3:19), the loving precedes; those who say we see choose the claim before the blindness is confirmed as sentence (9:41). Isaiah 6, in its own context, is exactly that: a judicial sentence pronounced over a people after generations of refusal, with a remnant still promised. God's hardening in Scripture ratifies and hands a person over to the refusal they have made and remade; it does not manufacture the refusal. The chapter itself has just shown seven signs met with seven refusals; the blinding is the seventh refusal notarized. Third, ten verses before the hardening text, Jesus declared the scope of the cross: I, when I am lifted up, will draw all men to myself. All. The same evangelist wrote both sentences a paragraph apart and saw no contradiction, because drawing all and judicially confirming the self-blinded are both true of the same God. Fourth, the Church's teaching is serene and ancient: Christ died for all without exception, there is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer (CCC 605), and God predestines no one to go to hell (CCC 1037); a willful turning away, persisted in, is required, and the hardening texts describe precisely that persistence meeting its ratification. Grace is truly necessary, 6:44 stands, no one comes unless drawn; and because God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4), that drawing is offered to all, resisted by some, and never issued as a trap. Nobody at this table is disqualified by decree. The door of the public ministry closes tonight; it closes on a Christ with his arms open to all men, which is, John tells us, the exact posture in which he will be lifted up.

DIG DEEPER

Isaiah saw his glory. If the group has energy, note the bombshell John drops in 12:41: Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke of him. The vision Isaiah 6 describes, the Lord high and lifted up, the seraphim crying Holy, Holy, Holy, the train filling the temple: John says the glory

Isaiah saw was Christ's. The prophet's temple vision was a vision of the Son. File it with the triple witness: the New Testament's quietest, hugest divinity claims are often relative clauses.

Synthesis question. The Book of Signs closes tonight: seven signs on a full tally, the Hour turned, a final public cry, and the door shut. In one sentence: what has the whole first half of this Gospel been asking you, personally, and what has it cost the one asking?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Every session has sharpened the same question: who is this, and will you entrust yourself to him, past your understanding, past your sign-appetite, past your aposynagōgos? Wine, water, bread, light, a voice that empties tombs: seven signs, each one a finger pointing, and the crowd kept eating the fingers. And the cost of the asking is now on the table: the seventh sign carried a death sentence in its mouth, the Hour has come, the grain has agreed to fall. The public ministry ends with Jesus crying out one last invitation into the crowd (12:44-50) and then, in effect, turning from the world to his own. Next week the doors close, the basin comes out, and we are inside the last night. If anyone's answer to the Gospel's question is still pending, tell them to bring it with them; the second half of this study is where pending answers go to be decided.

Send

1. Both sisters said the identical sentence: Lord, if you had been here. What is your version, the delay or absence you are still holding against God, and have you ever actually said it to his face, the way Martha got to?
2. The grain of wheat that refuses to fall remains alone. What in your life is remaining alone right now, a gift, an ambition, a comfort, because you will not let it fall into the ground?

Live It This Week

- **Say it to his face.** Martha and Mary both got to say if you had been here directly to Jesus, and he received it, wept, and answered. Once this week, in real prayer, say your version out loud, unedited. Lament is not unbelief; it is grief walking toward the right address.
- **One act of nard.** Do one deliberately uncalculated act of generosity this week, time, money, or attention, sized to make your inner Judas object. Let some house fill with fragrance, and give the accountant in your head the day off.
- **Pray at the tombs.** Visit a cemetery this week, or simply pray for your dead by name, and say John 11:25 over them: I am the resurrection and the life. Then the Church's ancient prayer for them: eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. The verse and the prayer belong together.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, resurrection and life, you wept at the tomb you were about to empty, and you set your face toward the Hour no one could take from you. We thank you before the gift, the way you taught us at Bethany. Take our four-day situations, our sealed tombs, our delays; call them by name. And as the grain of wheat falls, teach us to fall with you, that we may not remain alone. Glory be

to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 11:25-26

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 10, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 11:1-16** · opening reading, the delay inside the love, the sleep correction, Thomas' line
- **John 11:17-27** · four days, Martha, I am the resurrection and the life, her confession
- **John 11:28-37** · Mary, the shuddering indignation, Jesus wept
- **John 11:38-44** · the stone, the thanksgiving prayer, the cry, unbind him; Sign 7
- **1 Kings 17:17-24 and 2 Kings 4:32-37** · leader background contrast, the prophets' raisings versus the word of command
- **John 11:45-57** · Caiaphas, the prophecy despite himself, the plot formalized, Passover at hand
- **John 12:1-8** · the anointing at Bethany, three hundred denarii, the thief, for my burial
- **John 12:12-19** · the entry, Hosanna (Psalm 118:25-26 in text), the world has gone after him
- **Zechariah 9:9** · live discovery, the humble king on the ass
- **John 12:20-26** · the Greeks, THE TURN (12:23), the grain of wheat
- **John 12:27-36** · the troubled soul, for this purpose, the voice from heaven, the third lifted up saying and gloss
- **Isaiah 52:13** · leader reads aloud, lifted up and glorified, the servant song's opening
- **John 12:37-43** · steelman text, they could not believe, Isaiah 53:1 and 6:10 quoted, the secret believers
- **John 12:44-50** · the final public cry; the Book of Signs closes
- **CCC 605, 607, 994, 1037, 2604** · Catechism connections

BEHOLD THE LAMB: SESSION 11

He Loved Them to the End

John 13 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that the foot washing is not an interruption of Jesus' glory but its unveiling: knowing that all things were in his hands, he took a towel, and the very verbs of laying aside and taking again enact in miniature the laying down and taking up of his life. They watch the betrayal go out into the night, the light and darkness thread land in two words, and the new commandment receive its new and impossible measure: as I have loved you.

Catholic Touchstone: Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end (13:1; CCC 1337, 616). The towel as the definition of all authority in the Church, the bath and the feet as the shape of Baptism and ongoing forgiveness, and the mandatum the Church still provides for on her knees each Holy Thursday.

What You Need to Know

John 13:1 is the overture of the entire second half of the Gospel, and it deserves to be read like one: now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. Every loaded word in the study is present: the Passover (the third and last; your sealed guesses are inside their final week), the Hour (arrived, named, owned), and a new phrase whose weight you must carry alone for two more sessions: to the end, in Greek *eis telos*, to the end, to the uttermost, to completion. File the root: *telos*. The last word Jesus speaks from the cross in this Gospel, *tetelestai*, it is finished, it is completed, is this word conjugated. 13:1 and 19:30 are one bracket: the Book of Glory opens with love-to-the-telos and closes with the telos accomplished. Say nothing; know everything. Note also what disappears tonight: the signs. The tally closed at seven, and there will be no more, because the Book of Glory does not point at the reality; it is the reality arriving.

The foot washing's theology is in its syntax, and you should walk the group through it slowly. Before Jesus rises, John loads the sentence with everything Jesus knew: Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper (13:3-4). The full divine consciousness comes first, and then the towel: not a lapse of glory, not humility despite the majesty, but majesty's own self-expression. Because he knew he was God, he washed feet; the knowing is the reason, not the obstacle. And John's verb choice is a masterstroke your group can verify with their own eyes: he laid aside his garments (*tithēsin*) and afterward had taken them again (13:4, 12). These are the exact verbs of the Good Shepherd discourse: I lay down (*tithēmi*) my life, and I take it again (10:17-18). John narrates the disrobing and re-robing with the vocabulary of the dying and rising. The foot washing is the cross performed in miniature, a dress rehearsal with a towel, and once the group sees it they will never unsee it. The posture itself, stripped and girded with a towel, was a slave's: the task was proverbially slave's work, beneath free men. The hands into which the Father had given all things took the basin.

Peter's protest and overcorrection (13:6-10) are the session's pastoral gold. You shall never wash my feet is pride wearing humility's coat: Peter will serve, admire, even die (he thinks), but being served, being cleansed, kneeling receiver rather than noble giver, is intolerable to him. Jesus' answer makes receiving the non-negotiable: if I do not wash you, you have no part in me. Grace must be received before it can be imitated; a Christianity of pure self-donation that never lets Christ kneel to it has no part in him. Peter then overcorrects gloriously, not my feet only but also my hands and my head, and Jesus' reply distinguishes: he who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over. The Fathers, Augustine at their head, heard the sacramental architecture: the bath, once for all, is Baptism, and the feet, which gather the road's dust daily even on a clean man, are the daily faults needing ongoing forgiveness, the Our Father's forgive us our trespasses, and, for the serious wounds, in the Church's fuller reading, the sacrament of Penance. Offer the reading warmly and with its patristic pedigree; it preaches, and it sends people to Confession.

The mandatum (13:12-20) contains tonight's steelman, so read it precisely. Jesus asks, do you know what I have done to you?, and then does something the anti-hierarchical reading always skips: he affirms his own titles. You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. The rank is real and stated; what the towel changes is not whether authority exists but what it is for and how it kneels. I have given you an example (*hypodeigma*), that you also should do as I have done to you, followed by one of this Gospel's rare beatitudes: if you know these things, blessed are you if you do them, knowing is not the unit of measure; doing is. And verse 20, in the same breath as the towel: he who receives any one whom I send receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me, the principle of apostolic representation, sending and representation, voiced at the same table as the basin. Then the betrayal texts: verse 18 quotes Psalm 41:9, he who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me, tonight's live discovery, David betrayed by his trusted table-companion, and for your own preparation, the shadow behind the psalm: Ahithophel, David's counselor, who betrayed him and went and hanged himself (2 Samuel 17:23), a typology the group should not be handed but the leader should know. And verse 19 hides a jewel most readers miss: I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he (RSV2CE), *egō eimi*, absolute, one more entry for the tally, spoken over the betrayal itself: even the treachery, foreknown and folded into the plan, will end up testifying to the Name.

The morsel scene (13:21-30) introduces the beloved disciple, lying close to the breast of Jesus, and here is one of the most beautiful echoes in the Gospel: the word is kolpos, bosom, and John uses it only twice in the whole Gospel: here, *en tō kolpō* tou Iēsou, in the bosom of Jesus, and at 1:18, *eis ton kolpon* tou patros, the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known. The wording is not identical; the image is, and this is the only place John reaches for it again. The echo invites the reading that the beloved disciple is to Jesus something of what the Son is to the Father: the same posture of intimate knowing, and from that posture comes testimony; this Gospel claims to be written from that chest. Note also the Peter-and-beloved-disciple choreography beginning here, Peter beckoning, the other closer; the pairing will recur at the tomb and on a beach. The morsel itself must be taught correctly: dipping the choice morsel and handing it to a guest could be a gesture of honor and friendship, and many interpreters therefore hear Jesus' last act toward Judas not as exposure but as appeal, love making its final offer, and the offer is refused: then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. What you are going to do, do quickly. The table does not understand; and then John writes the two most devastating words of the Gospel's longest thread: he immediately went out; and it was night (13:30). Since 1:5 the group has tracked light and darkness; Nicodemus came out of the night toward the light; now Judas leaves the Light and walks into the night, and John, master of economy, lets the clock preach. Make the board moment count.

Then, with the betrayer gone and the machinery of death in motion, Jesus says the sentence that inverts every human category: now is the Son of Man glorified (13:31). Now: with Judas in the dark and the cross now hours away. The glory thread and the Hour are one thing now. And the new commandment: love one another; even as I have loved you. Leviticus 19:18 already commanded love of neighbor as oneself; what is new is the measure: no longer as yourself, but as I have loved you, to-the-telos love, towel-and-cross love, and it is made the Church's identifying mark before the watching world: by this all men will know that you are my disciples. Not by arguments won; by love recognizable at a distance. The chapter closes with Peter's magnificent, doomed boast, and notice whose words he borrows: I will lay down my life for you, the Good Shepherd's own sentence from 10:11, claimed by a man who does not yet know what it costs. Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times. Plant it cleanly: a bird, three denials. And, leader only: a charcoal fire is coming, twice.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Psalms 41:9.** He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me: David betrayed by his table-companion, quoted by Jesus at 13:18. The live discovery.
- **2 Samuel 15-17 (esp. 17:23).** Ahithophel, David's trusted counselor, betrays him and goes and hangs himself. Leader background only; the shadow behind the psalm, offered with hedged language if it surfaces.
- **Leviticus 19:18.** You shall love your neighbor as yourself: the old commandment whose measure the *mandatum novum* fulfills and surpasses with as I have loved you. Quick reference.
- **Exodus 12.** The Passover frame of 13:1. Under seal; the third Passover has arrived and the guesses mature in Session 13.
- **Isaiah 52:13-53:12.** The servant song continues to hum beneath everything. Leader background; the neighborhood remains sealed.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Doctor of the Church, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractates 56-57

Augustine reads the bath and the feet with a pastor's realism: the man who has bathed is clean all over, the once-for-all bath of Baptism; and yet, so long as he walks this earth, his feet gather the dust of the road, the daily human affections and small failures no traveler avoids. So the Lord who bathed us once stoops daily to wash our feet, in the forgiveness we beg in the Our Father and receive in the Church, for even the baptized must pray, forgive us our trespasses. The bath is not repeated; the footwashing never stops.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-547), *The Rule of St. Benedict*, chapters 35 and 53

Benedict did not admire the towel; he legislated it. In his Rule, the brothers who complete their week of kitchen service wash the feet of the whole community, and when guests arrive, the abbot himself and the brethren wash their feet, because, the Rule says, all guests are to be received as Christ. Fifteen centuries of monks have knelt on schedule ever since. The *mandatum*, in Benedict's hands, stopped being a sentiment and became a rota: love with a schedule, humility with assigned

shifts.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Jerome (c. 347-420), Doctor of the Church, recounting the aged Apostle John, Commentary on Galatians

Jerome preserves the most tender tradition about tonight's author. The Apostle John, extremely old in Ephesus, carried to the assembly in the arms of his disciples, could no longer preach at length and would say only, little children, love one another. Asked why he always repeated it, he answered: because it is the Lord's commandment, and if it alone is kept, it is enough. The apostle whom tradition knows as the one who leaned on Jesus' breast at this supper spent his last strength repeating this chapter's one commandment, and judged it sufficient.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1337.** The Catechism's doorway to the Eucharist opens with this verse: having loved his own, he loved them to the end; and in order never to depart from his own, he washed their feet and instituted the Eucharist.
- **CCC 616.** It is love to the end that confers on Christ's sacrifice its value as redemption: the *eis telos* of 13:1 is the price tag of the cross.
- **CCC 1823.** Jesus makes charity the new commandment, loving as he loves: the measure, not merely the fact, of love is what is new.
- **CCC 520.** In all of his life Jesus presents himself as our model: he is the perfect man who invites us to become his disciples and follow him; by his self-emptying he gives us an example to imitate.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

The Hour. Arrived and owned: when Jesus knew that his hour had come (13:1). Everything remaining in the study happens inside the Hour. The board line is fully lit.

Light and darkness (LANDS). He immediately went out; and it was night (13:30). The thread planted at 1:5 lands in two words. Give the board moment real silence. The thread is not finished, dawn is coming in later chapters, but the plunge is tonight.

The betrayal (CONVERGES). The devil in the heart (13:2), the psalm of the table-companion (13:18), the morsel of honor refused, Satan entering, the night. The line the group opened at the Bread of Life discourse goes out the door tonight.

I AM. A hidden absolute: that when it does take place you may believe that I am he (13:19; the Greek a bare *egō eimi*), spoken over the betrayal itself. Log it; the group will be startled it is there. One more absolute use remains, in a garden, and it is leader knowledge only.

Laying down and taking again. The garment verbs of 13:4 and 12 are the life verbs of 10:17-18. Name it when the group verifies it: the foot washing is the cross in miniature.

Eis telos (leader only). The root of to the end (13:1) returns as the last word from the cross, *tetelestai*, it is finished (19:30). The bracket completes in Session 13. Absolute seal.

The beloved disciple and Peter. Introduced tonight in the bosom of Jesus, the same rare bosom-word as 1:18, the Son in the bosom of the Father. Name the echo; it is beautiful and spoils nothing. The Peter-and-beloved-disciple pairing begins; it recurs at a tomb and on a beach.

Peter's denial (PLANTED). The boast in the Shepherd's own borrowed words (10:11), and the prediction: a cock, three denials. Tell the group to watch for a bird. Leader only: watch also for a charcoal fire, twice.

Passover and the Lamb (sealed, FINAL APPROACH). Before the feast of the Passover (13:1). The narrative is now inside the week. Two sessions to maturity. Total silence.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain from the syntax of 13:3-4 that the towel expresses the divine consciousness rather than interrupting it.
2. Participants verify the garment verbs against 10:17-18 and can state that the foot washing enacts the laying down and taking up of his life.
3. Participants wrestle with Peter's refusal to be served, and can articulate the bath and feet as Baptism and ongoing forgiveness.
4. Participants hear the strongest case that the towel abolishes hierarchy, and weigh it against 13:13, 13:20, and the Church's own institutionalized mandatum.
5. Participants feel and it was night land on the board, and can state what is new in the new commandment.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 12 minutes. Build, 58 minutes. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 20 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: the Dig Deeper on the trouble triad, the Leviticus 19:18 lookup in question 8 (cite it verbally), and the second Win question. Do not cut: the syntax walk of 13:3-4, the garment verbs, Peter's protest, the steelman, the morsel with and it was night, or the denial prediction. One chapter tonight; let the pace breathe, and let 13:30 have its silence.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, on the night you were betrayed, knowing that all things were in your hands, you took a towel. Take us into that room tonight. Wash what we would rather hide, teach us what we would rather skip, and give us the one commandment your beloved disciple never stopped repeating: that we love one another as you have loved us. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. Has someone with every right to be served ever done something for you that was beneath them? What did it do to you?
2. Has anyone ever predicted your failure to your face, and been right? What did their being right do to the relationship?

Transition: The signs are over; the tally is full. Tonight the doors close on the public, the basin comes out, and we are inside the last night. Everything from here to the cross happens within about twenty-four hours; the study's last dawn waits just beyond it.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 13:1 aloud, alone, twice. Then ask:

Question 1. This single verse is the overture of the Gospel's whole second half. Unpack its freight: what feast frames it, what has finally happened to the Hour, and how far does John say this love goes? Sit on the phrase to the end for a moment: what might loving to the end have to mean, before this week is over?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Before the feast of the Passover: the third and final Passover, and our narrative is now inside its week. When Jesus knew that his hour had come: the Hour we watched turn at 12:23 is here, named, owned, and everything remaining happens inside it. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end: not merely to the last moment, but to the uttermost, to completion, love run all the way out. Let the group speculate on what to the end will require, and confirm nothing; the Gospel intends to show them rather than tell them. One structural note to give plainly: the signs are finished. Seven stand on the tally, and there will be no eighth, because the Book of Glory does not point at the reality. It is the reality, arriving.

Question 2. Read 13:2-5, and read verse 3 like a lawyer: before Jesus ever rises from the table, what three things does John insist he knew? Then watch the sequence: knowing all that, what does he do? And one for the Greek-watchers, checkable in any interlinear: verses 4 and 12 say he laid aside his garments and took them again. Where in this Gospel have we heard exactly those two verbs, about something much bigger than clothing?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He knew that the Father had given all things into his hands, that he had come from God, and that he

was going to God: origin, destiny, and total authority, the fullest statement of divine consciousness in the Gospel, and John places it immediately before the towel on purpose. The washing is not humility in spite of the majesty; it is what the majesty does. Because all things were in his hands, his hands took the basin. And the verbs: he lays aside (tithēsin) his garments and takes them again, the precise verbs of 10:17-18, I lay down my life, that I may take it again. John has narrated a man undressing and re-dressing in the vocabulary of dying and rising. The foot washing is the cross performed in miniature, less than a day early, with a towel for a shroud, and the slave's task he performs was so low it was proverbially left to slaves. The hands holding all things held twelve dirty feet, one pair belonging to the man about to sell him.

Question 3. Read 13:6-11. Diagnose Peter honestly: you shall never wash my feet sounds humble; is it? What does Jesus make non-negotiable in verse 8, and why would refusing to receive cut a man off from having part in him? Then the overcorrection and the answer: what is the bath, what are the feet, and what does the distinction look like in Catholic life?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Peter's refusal is pride in humility's coat: he will serve, admire, defend, and (he thinks) die, but he cannot bear to kneel as a receiver. Many of the most generous people in your group have the same disease, endlessly giving, incapable of being given to, and Jesus diagnoses it as fatal: if I do not wash you, you have no part in me. Christianity is received before it is performed; grace comes first or it is not grace, and a discipleship that never lets Christ kneel to it has no part in him. Then the overcorrection, hands and head too!, and the reply that the Fathers heard sacramentally: he who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over. The bath, once for all, is Baptism, never repeated; and the feet are the road's daily dust, the small failures no walking man avoids, met by the daily footwashing of the Our Father's forgive us our trespasses, and, when the dust is more than dust, in the Church's practice, by the sacrament of Penance. Bathed once, feet washed continually: that is simply the Catholic life described from a first-century floor.

Question 4. Read 13:12-17. Do you know what I have done to you? Before answering what the towel teaches, catch what Jesus says about himself in verse 13: does he renounce his titles? Then the example (hypodeigma) and verse 17's rare beatitude: where does Jesus locate the blessing?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He affirms the titles in full: you call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. The rank is not dissolved by the towel; it is defined by it. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet: authority in his kingdom is henceforth measured by the basin it carries. And the beatitude relocates the payoff: if you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. Not blessed are you if you are moved by them, or can explain them; this Gospel of high theology ends its most theological scene with the bluntest possible test: doing. Hold verse 13 in your hand; the steelman is about to want it.

Steelman: Does the Towel Abolish Hierarchy?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

Many low-church Protestants, and many disillusioned Catholics, read this scene as Christianity's permanent verdict against religious hierarchy, and the case has real force. Here is the Lord of glory on the floor with a towel, deliberately inverting every rank in the room, and commanding the inversion as the pattern: you also ought to wash one another's feet; a servant is not greater than his master. Elsewhere he forbade his followers the very love of titles and places of honor that clericalism feeds on. And yet, the argument runs, within a few centuries the Church of the towel had thrones, courts, vestments modeled on imperial dress, and a graded pyramid of ranks, and Catholicism today still runs on hierarchy, excellencies, and eminences, the very apparatus this chapter kneels to wash away. The towel, on this reading, abolishes the pyramid: true Christianity is a fellowship of equals with no priestly caste, and every structure of ordained authority is a betrayal of the basin. And there is a sober version of the case that is harder to answer than the radical one. It grants ordination, elders, ordered ministry and accountable governance, because the New Testament plainly has them; it grants that authority in the Church is real. Its question is narrower and sharper: Jesus forbids his followers status-seeking and domination, the New Testament describes ministry with the vocabulary of service and never with the vocabulary of court rank, and yet within a few centuries the Church of the towel had graded jurisdiction, honorifics and ceremonial borrowed straight from empire. Does that development follow from apostolic ministry, or did something foreign attach itself to it? Put that version at the table too, because most thoughtful Protestants hold it, not the radical one. State the case with its full sting; church history has given it plenty of ammunition, and someone at your table has been personally wounded by rank worn without a towel.

Question 5 (press from the text). Three probes, all from tonight's chapter. First: what did Jesus just say about his own titles in verse 13, in the middle of the washing? Second: read verse 20, still at the same table: what principle does Jesus establish minutes after the towel, and what does receiving one whom I send require to exist? Third: what has the Church actually done with this scene, liturgically and in her deepest self-understanding of office, and what happens in communities that abolish office in humility's name?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

First: the towel and the titles coexist in the same sentence, from the same mouth: you call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If the scene abolished rank, it would have to begin by abolishing his, and instead he affirms it and then kneels, which is the whole point: authority is not denied but redefined, its insignia changed from throne to basin. Second, verse 20 is devastating to the no-office reading: he who receives any one whom I send receives me, spoken at the same supper, minutes after the towel, voices sending and representation, the apostolic principle within which the Church's ordinations stand. The chapter that supposedly abolishes hierarchy voices the very principle of authorized mission that the Church's ordained ministry presupposes, and the two fit perfectly once the towel defines the office. The full case for ordination and apostolic succession rests on the whole New Testament and the Church's teaching, not on this verse alone; what this verse does is make the no-office reading much harder to hold. Third, the Church did not file this scene away; she legislated it: each Holy Thursday the Roman Rite provides the Mandatum, and popes and bishops have knelt at it for centuries, the towel built into the liturgy precisely for the hierarchy; St. Benedict put footwashing on the monastic rota; and St. Gregory the Great took for himself the title *servus servorum Dei*, servant of the servants of God, which later popes kept as the

papacy's standing self-description. And to the sober version, which deserves a straight answer: ordered office and jurisdiction are not the same thing as princely ceremonial, and the Church has in fact reformed and stripped away the ceremonial repeatedly, most recently and deliberately in the last century, without ever surrendering the office. The New Testament itself refuses to separate service from authority: the same apostles who are told to wash feet also bind and loose, ordain, correct churches by letter, and settle a doctrinal crisis at Jerusalem with the words it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. So the question the towel actually puts is not whether jurisdiction survived it, but whether jurisdiction kneels. Where rank has been worn without the towel, and it has, God have mercy, the failure indicts the men, not the office, exactly as Judas indicts Judas and not the apostolate he betrayed from. And honesty requires the last observation: communities that abolish ordained office in humility's name do not thereby abolish power; they render it informal, unaccountable, and invisible, which the wounded can testify is not an upgrade. The towel does not erase the shepherd's office; it tells the shepherd what his crozier is for. The test of any authority in Christ's Church is not whether it exists but whether its knees bend.

Question 6 (live discovery). Read 13:18-20. Jesus says the betrayal will fulfill Scripture and quotes a line. Send the group to Psalm 41:9 and read it in its setting. Whose experience is this psalm, and what does eating bread together add to the treachery? Then look very closely at verse 19: what exactly does Jesus say the betrayal, once it happens, will lead them to believe? There is an entry for our board hiding in it.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Psalm 41 is David's: even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me. Table fellowship was covenant in miniature; to eat a man's bread and strike him was treachery squared, and David knew it from his own trusted counselor. Jesus quotes the psalm while the bread is still on the table and the friend still at it. And verse 19: I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he (RSV2CE), egō eimi, absolute, no predicate, one more entry for the tally, and look where it stands: spoken over the betrayal. Even the treachery is foreknown, folded into the plan, and will end by testifying to the Name. Nothing that happens in the next twenty-four hours will be happening to a victim taken by surprise.

Question 7. Read 13:21-30, slowly. Three things to find. First, the new character: how is the beloved disciple positioned at the table, and, memory check, where has this Gospel used that same rare bosom-word once before? Second, the morsel: in that culture, what kind of gesture was it to dip the choice piece and hand it to a guest, and what does that make Jesus' last act toward Judas? Third, the final two words of the scene. Give them their silence, and then place them on the board.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The beloved disciple lies close to the breast of Jesus, en tō kolpō, in the bosom, and the only other bosom in this Gospel is 1:18: the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known. The disciple is to Jesus what the Son is to the Father: intimacy that becomes testimony, and this Gospel claims to be written from that chest. Watch him and Peter from now on; the pairing has appointments ahead. The morsel: dipping the choicest piece and offering it to a guest was, many interpreters note, a gesture of honor and friendship, making Jesus' final act toward his betrayer is

not exposure but appeal, love extending the seat of honor one last time, and it is refused: then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. What you are going to do, do quickly, and no one at the table understands. And then John, the great economist, lets the clock preach: he immediately went out; and it was night. Two words, and the thread we planted at 1:5, the light shines in the darkness, tracked through a man who came by night and a feast of candelabras, lands. Nicodemus walked out of the night toward the Light and is still walking; Judas walks away from the Light into the night with bread in his hand. Write and it was night on the board and give the room ten full seconds of quiet.

Question 8. Read 13:31-35. First sentence out of Jesus' mouth once the betrayer is gone: NOW is the Son of Man glorified. Now? With Judas in the dark and the cross not a day away? What has this Gospel done to the word glory? Then the commandment: love was already commanded in Leviticus 19:18, love your neighbor as yourself. What exactly is new in the new commandment, and what job does verse 35 assign to it?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Now, because in this Gospel the glorification is the Hour, and the Hour is the lifting up, and the machinery just engaged: glory in John is not what happens after the cross as compensation; the cross, freely embraced for love, is the glory, Isaiah's lifted up and glorified fused, as the group saw last week. And the newness of the commandment is its measure: not as yourself, the old and already demanding standard, but as I have loved you, which the room has just watched defined: to the end, with a towel, toward feet that included his betrayer's. And verse 35 assigns this love the Church's entire public apologetic: by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. Not by our arguments, our aesthetics, or our numbers: by love visible at a distance. The world has always reserved the right to judge the sermon by the congregation, and Jesus, alarmingly, signed off on the method.

Question 9. Read 13:36-38. Peter's boast is magnificent, and listen closely to his exact words: I will lay down my life for you. Whose sentence is he borrowing, from which discourse? And the prediction that answers him: what precisely will happen before what sound? Put it on the board as a planted thread, and say what it must have been like to hear.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Peter borrows the Good Shepherd's own line: I lay down my life for the sheep (10:11), claimed now by a sheep who believes himself ready to be the shepherd, and the love in the boast is real even though the strength is imagined. The answer is surgical: will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times. Not a doubt, a schedule: before a specific bird sings, three specific denials. Plant it on the board: a cock, three times, and tell the group to listen for the bird in Session 13. What must the next hours have felt like for Peter, carrying that prediction? And here is the mercy already hidden in the wound: the Lord who predicts the fall is the same Lord who just washed the feet that will run, and who loves, we were told in the first verse, to the end. The end is further away than Peter's failure. Keep the boast and the borrowed sentence in mind; this study will hear about laying down life and following one more time, on a beach, and it will break your heart in the good direction.

DIG DEEPER

Troubled, three times. If the group has energy, track a word: deeply moved and troubled at Lazarus' tomb (11:33), now is my soul troubled before the Greeks (12:27), and tonight, troubled in spirit over the betrayer (13:21). The same verb, three times, as the Hour closes in. The Word made flesh approaches his Passion with a genuinely human interior: grief, dread, and the ache of betrayed friendship. He does not glide to the cross; he walks to it, feeling everything, and chooses it anyway, which is precisely what makes 10:18 glorious rather than effortless.

Synthesis question. One sentence each: what did Jesus teach with the towel that no sermon could have taught, and, given where the word *telos* is headed, what do you now suspect loved them to the end is going to mean?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Listen for the group to land somewhere near: authority is for kneeling, glory looks like service, and love is proven at floor level, taught in a way ears could have argued with but feet could not. And on to the end: let their suspicions grow dark and true, a love that will not stop at dignity, at comfort, at betrayal, at death itself, a love with no point at which it says, this far and no further. They are one session of farewell and one Passover away from watching the sentence finish itself. If someone says, the towel was the trailer, the session has landed.

Send

1. Whose feet, name them privately, would be hardest for you to wash, and what is the actual obstacle: their unworthiness, or your rank?
2. Peter could not bear to be washed. Which is genuinely harder for you: serving, or letting yourself be served, forgiven, helped? What does your answer tell you?

Live It This Week

- **Wash one set of feet.** Choose one concrete act of service this week that is genuinely beneath you, unglamorous, unthanked, for one specific person, and do it quietly. Not service in general: one basin, one pair of feet, this week.
- **Let him wash you.** The bathed still need their feet washed. Get to Confession this week if it has been a while: kneel as a receiver, which Peter found harder than dying, and let the Lord do the part you cannot.
- **The old apostle's examen.** The aged John repeated one sentence: little children, love one another, and called it enough. Each night this week, end the day with his one question: did I love them today, as he has loved me? One question, honestly answered, is a complete examen.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, Teacher and Lord, for so you are, you knelt at the feet of the men who would fail you and loved them to the end. Wash us; we will not refuse like Peter, or we will, and you will be patient. Give us towels for our rank, basins for our pride, and your own measure for our love. And as the night takes the betrayer out the door, keep us at the table with you, near your breast, like the

disciple you loved. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 13:34

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 11, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 13:1** · the overture: Passover, the Hour arrived, loved to the end (eis telos)
- **John 13:2-5** · the knowing before the towel; the garment verbs (tithēsin, 13:4, 12)
- **John 10:17-18** · cross-reference for the verbs: I lay down my life, that I may take it again
- **John 13:6-11** · Peter's protest and overcorrection; the bath and the feet
- **John 13:12-17** · Teacher and Lord affirmed; the hypodeigma; blessed if you do them
- **John 13:18-20** · the betrayal foretold; the hidden absolute I AM (13:19); he who receives whom I send
- **Psalms 41:9** · live discovery, the table-companion's heel
- **2 Samuel 17:23** · LEADER ONLY, hedged: Ahithophel, the counselor who betrayed and hanged himself
- **John 13:21-30** · the trouble, the beloved disciple in the bosom (compare 1:18), the morsel of honor, and it was night
- **John 13:31-35** · now is the Son of Man glorified; the mandatum novum and its measure
- **Leviticus 19:18** · quick reference, the old commandment's measure
- **John 13:36-38** · Peter's boast in the Shepherd's borrowed words; the cock and the three denials
- **CCC 520, 616, 1337, 1823** · Catechism connections

The Paraclete and the Vine

John 14-16 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that on his last night Jesus builds everything his people will need for the time after: the way to the Father that is himself, four promises of another Advocate who will guard the apostles' memory and guide them into all truth, and the vine in which abiding is life and apart from which we can do nothing. The seven great I AM predicates complete tonight, and the dwelling thread the group has traced from a tent to a body makes its final, staggering move: into the believer.

Catholic Touchstone: The Holy Spirit and the apostolic memory. The Paraclete promises of this discourse, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you (14:26), he will guide you into all truth (16:13), are the charter of the inspired Gospels and of the Church's living transmission of the deposit (CCC 76-79). And the vine: the Spirit is the sap of the Father's vine which bears fruit on its branches (CCC 1108).

What You Need to Know

Chapters 14 through 16 are one conversation on one night, the longest sustained teaching in the Gospel, and the tone has changed: the crowds are gone, the betrayer is gone, and Jesus speaks now only to his own. The first sentence hands them his own vocabulary: let not your hearts be troubled (*tarassō*), the very verb used of Jesus himself three times as the Hour approached (11:33, 12:27, 13:21). He has carried the trouble so they need not. The comfort begins with real estate: in my Father's house are many rooms, *monai*, dwelling places, and file the word, because it returns transformed within the chapter. Thomas, honest and gloomy as ever, objects that they do not even know the road, and his objection births the sixth predicate I AM: I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me (14:6). Two payoffs to collect on the spot. First, the group's Session 5 press argued that in John the truth is not a concept but a person; here is the receipt, from Jesus' own mouth. Second, the way is not directions he gives but a road he is: Christianity does not primarily hand out maps; it carries passengers.

The Paraclete promises, four of them across the discourse, are the session's doctrinal spine, and the word matters: *Paraklētos*, one called alongside, advocate, counselor, comforter, a courtroom word for the friend who stands with you. And Jesus says the Father will give another Paraclete, *allos*, another Advocate besides the one they have had, which quietly tells us, with 1 John 2:1, who the first Advocate was. Promise one (14:16-17): the Spirit of truth will be with you for ever, dwells with you, and will be in you. Promise two (14:26): he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you, the verse on which the reliability of the Gospels themselves rests, and the home of tonight's steelman, so prepare it with care. Promise three (15:26): the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me, and your group should hear the Creed waking up in their hands: who proceeds from the Father is this verse verbatim. A gentle note if it arises: Jesus also says whom I shall send to you from the Father, the sending from the Son, which the Latin tradition confesses as proceeding from the Father and the Son and the Greek Fathers loved to phrase from the Father through the Son; one

sentence of irenic accuracy, and move on. Promise four (16:7-15): the astonishing it is to your advantage that I go away, for the Paraclete will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment, and will guide you into all truth... he will glorify me. The Spirit's ministry is Christ-centripetal: he does not freelance; he glorifies the Son, reminds, and guides, which is also, note well, the test of every claimed movement of the Spirit since.

Between the first and second promises sits the dwelling thread's final move, and it deserves a real board moment. The group has traced God's dwelling narrowing for eleven sessions: the tent of 1:14, Bethel and its ladder at 1:51, the temple of his body at 2:21, and worship relocated into that body in chapter 4. Now 14:23: if a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him, *monēn*, the singular of the many rooms of 14:2, and the noun of the verb that will dominate chapter 15, *menō*, to abide, to remain, to dwell. The dwelling of God has narrowed to one body, and from that body it now widens into everyone who loves and keeps his word: tent, ladder, temple, you. The indwelling of the Trinity in the soul in grace, the doctrine the mystics never stopped singing, is this verse. And the discourse's bequest follows: peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives (14:27), words the Church places on the priest's lips at Mass, lightly adapted, just before Communion. Your group has been praying this chapter weekly without knowing the address.

Chapter 15 opens with the seventh and final predicate: I am the true vine. Ceremony first, content second: the board's I AM line, opened at a Samaritan well, now carries seven predicates, bread of life, light of the world, the door, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way and the truth and the life, the true vine, and the group that kept the tally deserves to read them aloud in a row. Then the Old Testament engine, tonight's live discovery: Israel was the vine, brought out of Egypt and planted (Psalm 80:8-16), and the vineyard song of Isaiah 5 records the tragedy: the beloved's vineyard, given every care, yielded wild grapes. When Jesus says true vine, he is claiming to be, in his own person, the faithful Israel the vine was always meant to be: the stock that finally bears. The Father is the vinedresser, and the Greek plays on his tools: every fruitless branch he takes away (*airei*), every fruitful one he prunes (*kathairei*) that it may bear more. Do not soften 15:2 and 15:6 for your group, and note their doctrinal weight honestly: every branch of mine that bears no fruit, of mine, genuinely in him, and such branches can be cast forth, wither, and burn. Abiding is not automatic; union with Christ, really begun, can really be abandoned, which is why the Church has never taught once saved, always saved, and Trent, teaching on grace and abiding, reached for this very vine (citing 15:5). The remedy is the chapter's refrain, ten times in eleven verses: abide, *menō*, remain, dwell, stay connected, for apart from me you can do nothing (15:5; CCC 2074). And the deepest abiding this Gospel knows was named at Capernaum: he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him (6:56; CCC 1391). St. Cyril of Alexandria drew the line the Church still draws: the branches share the vine's own life the way communicants share Christ's own flesh; the Eucharist is how the sap flows.

The rest of the discourse alternates tenderness and storm. No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends (15:15), and the election that follows is for mission: you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit. Then the storm: the world's hatred, if they persecuted me, they will persecute you, and the escalation of *aposynagōgos*: they will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God (16:2). And near the end, an image that belongs to your Hour line and quietly to next session: when a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy (16:21). The Hour, which the group has tracked as appointment and as glory, is here named as labor: the anguish that is the mechanism of the joy, the birth-pangs the prophets promised for the age to come (Isaiah 26:17, 66:7-14, leader background). File

privately: a Woman, anguish, and something being born will all stand together at the foot of the cross next week. The discourse ends with the sentence the Church has carried through every persecution since: I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (16:33). Perfect tense: the outcome is already settled, announced the night before the battle.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Psalm 80:8-16.** Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt: Israel as the transplanted vine, ravaged and burned, with the plea, have regard for this vine. The central live discovery.
- **Isaiah 5:1-7.** The song of the vineyard: every care given, and it yielded wild grapes. Read aloud or second lookup; the tragedy the true vine answers.
- **Isaiah 26:17 and 66:7-14.** The birth-pangs of the age to come: Zion in travail, and joy after. Leader background for 16:21.
- **Zechariah 13:7.** Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered: behind 16:32, you will be scattered, every man to his home. Leader background.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-202), *Against Heresies* 3.24

Irenaeus, two generations from the apostles, states where the Paraclete's promises live: where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace. The Spirit and the apostolic community are not rivals to be chosen between; they are one gift with one address. Those who separate themselves from the Church, he says, separate themselves from the Spirit's fountain, drinking instead from cracked cisterns of their own digging, and the group has met that image before.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376-444), *Doctor of the Church, Commentary on the Gospel of John, on chapter 15*

Cyril will not let the vine stay a metaphor about attitudes. As the branch shares the very nature and life of the vine, he argues, so we come to share Christ's own life, and not merely by affection or agreement: through the Eucharist we are united to his very flesh, the mystical blessing making us concorporeal with him, so that his life circulates in us the way sap circulates in branches. Abide in me is not a mood; it is a communion, and the Church keeps it at an altar.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), *Doctor of the Church, The Dialogue*

Catherine's great image for I am the way is the Bridge: the eternal Father showed her his Son as a bridge stretched from heaven to earth, built across the flood that no one could ford, with the wounded feet, the open side, and the mouth of peace as its stairs. There is no crossing the flood except by the Bridge, she hears the Father say, and whoever tries to swim it drowns. No one comes to the Father but by me is not a narrowness, Catherine insists; it is the only architecture that spans the gap at all, and it was built at the price of the builder.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 76-79.** The apostolic Tradition: the Spirit-guarded transmission of what the apostles received, in Scripture and in the Church's living memory, so that the Father's conversation with the Bride never ceases. The doctrinal home of 14:26 and 16:13.
- **CCC 245-246.** The procession of the Spirit: the Creed's who proceeds from the Father from 15:26, and the Latin and Eastern traditions' complementary confessions, from the Father and the Son, and from the Father through the Son.
- **CCC 1108.** The Catechism's own vine sentence: the Holy Spirit is the sap of the Father's vine which bears its fruit on its branches; the sacraments are where the sap flows.
- **CCC 2074.** Apart from me you can do nothing: the fruitfulness of every work depends on abiding, quoted directly from 15:5.
- **CCC 1391.** Holy Communion augments our union with Christ: he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him; the vine's abiding and the Eucharist's abiding are one vocabulary.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

I AM (PREDICATES COMPLETE). The sixth (way, truth, life, 14:6) and seventh (true vine, 15:1) predicates complete the set. Hold the ceremony: have the group read all seven aloud from the board in order. The absolute uses are not finished; one remains, in a garden, next session, and it will knock men down. Leader knowledge only.

The dwelling thread (INTERIORIZES). Tent (1:14), Bethel (1:51), temple of his body (2:21), and now: we will come to him and make our home with him (14:23), and abide in me (15:4). The dwelling of God narrowed to a body and now widens into everyone who loves him and keeps his word. Draw the final arrow on the board and let it land.

The truth is a person (PAYS OFF). The Session 5 press claimed it; 14:6 signs it. Collect the receipt aloud.

Living water and the Spirit. The not yet given of 7:39 gets its schedule: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go, the Paraclete will not come (16:7). The glorification releases the Spirit. The hinge the group logged at Tabernacles is swinging.

The Hour (AS LABOR). A new and tender entry: the woman in travail, because her hour has come, and joy that forgets the anguish (16:21). The Hour is appointment, glory, and now birth-pang. Log it; say nothing of where a Woman and an anguish will stand next week.

Peter and the scattering. You will be scattered, every man to his home (16:32). The denial prediction gains company; Zechariah's struck shepherd is leader background.

Cana to the vine. Quiet arc worth one sentence if the group finds it: the study opened with water made wine, and the discourse ends with I am the true vine. The wine had a source all along.

Passover and the Lamb (sealed, MATURITY NEXT SESSION). Nothing advances tonight, and everything is about to. Take-Home 12 instructs every participant to bring their sealed guess to Session 13. Make sure it does not get skipped.

Session Goals

1. Participants can name the four Paraclete promises and what each gives: presence, memory and teaching, witness and procession, conviction and guidance into all truth.
2. Participants hear the strongest private-interpretation reading of the promises and weigh it against the upper room's addressees, the unfulfillable-remembrance problem, and the both/and of Spirit and Church.
3. Participants complete the seven predicate I AMs and read them aloud as a set.
4. Participants trace the dwelling thread's interiorization, tent to Bethel to body to believer, and connect abiding to the Eucharist (6:56, CCC 1391).
5. Participants can state honestly what 15:2 and 15:6 teach about perseverance, and take apart from me you can do nothing personally.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 12 minutes. Build, 60 minutes; three chapters demand thematic movement, not verse-crawling. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 18 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: Build question 7 on friendship and election (compress to leader narration), the Isaiah 5 second lookup (read it aloud yourself instead), and the Dig Deeper on the Advocate in court. Do not cut: 14:6 with its Session 5 receipt, the steelman, the vine discovery with the seven-predicate ceremony, the 14:23 dwelling move, or 16:33. End by reminding everyone, twice, to bring their sealed guess next week.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Come, Holy Spirit, Paraclete, Advocate, Spirit of truth. On his last night the Lord promised you to his friends, to teach, to remind, to abide. We are his friends gathered tonight; keep the promise here. Prune what is fruitless in us, keep us on the vine, and let not our hearts be troubled. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. What is the best thing anyone ever said to you before a big goodbye, a deployment, a move, a deathbed, a graduation? Why did it hold?
2. Has something painful in your life ever turned out, honestly, to be to your advantage? How long did it take to see it?

Transition: Judas is in the night, the cross is hours away, and Jesus spends his last free evening not defending himself but furnishing his friends for the time after. Tonight we inherit the furniture.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 14:1-7 aloud. Then ask:

Question 1. Let not your hearts be troubled: whose word is troubled in this Gospel, and what does it mean that he now hands the verb to them? Then Thomas, honest as ever, admits they do not know the way, and receives the sixth great I AM. Read 14:6 aloud and collect a debt: in Session 5 we argued something about what the truth is in this Gospel. What receipt did Jesus just sign?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Troubled is Jesus' own recent biography: deeply troubled at Lazarus' tomb (11:33), now is my soul troubled (12:27), troubled in spirit over the betrayer (13:21). He has carried the trouble through, and now hands them the release: let not your hearts be. Then 14:6, the sixth predicate for the board: I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. The Session 5 receipt: we pressed then that in John the truth is not a proposition but a person, and here it is from his own mouth. And the way is likewise not directions but a road that is alive: Christianity does not primarily hand out maps; it carries passengers. St. Catherine of Siena saw it as the Bridge flung across a flood no one can swim: the exclusivity of 14:6 is not narrowness but architecture, the only span there is, built at the builder's expense.

Question 2. Read 14:8-17. Philip asks for the one thing that would settle everything: show us the Father. Weigh the answer. Then the first of four promises: what, or who, is a Paraklētōs, and press on the small word another in verse 16: another Advocate besides whom, and which text tells us who the first one is?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He who has seen me has seen the Father: the answer to show us the Father is that the showing has been standing in front of Philip for three years, which is the Prologue's claim (1:18) in the second person. Paraklētōs is a courtroom word: one called alongside, the advocate who stands with you

when you stand accused, counselor and comforter in one. And *allos* means another: another Advocate alongside the one they have known, and 1 John 2:1 names that first Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous. The Spirit is not a lesser substitute or a vague influence; he is Advocate as Jesus is Advocate, with you for ever, dwelling with you, and, the promise deepens, in you.

Question 3. Read 14:18-24, and bring the board. I will not leave you orphans. Then verse 23: what do the Father and Son promise to do with the one who loves and keeps the word? The Greek noun there, *monē*, home, dwelling, is the singular of the many rooms of 14:2. Now trace our oldest architectural thread out loud: where has the dwelling of God been, station by station, since Session 1, and where has it just arrived?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

We will come to him and make our home with him. Trace it on the board and let the group say the stations: the Word pitched his tent among us (1:14); Jesus stands in Bethel's place, house of God and gate of heaven (1:51); the temple of his body (2:21); worship relocated into that body (chapter 4); and now, the final move: the dwelling widens from his body into every believer who loves him and keeps his word. Tent, ladder, temple, you. The indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the soul in grace, the doctrine the mystics never stopped singing, is this verse, and it is not a metaphor: the same God whose glory filled the tabernacle so thickly Moses could not enter proposes to make his home in the people at this table. Give the arrow its silence.

Question 4. Read 14:25-27. The second promise, verse 26, carries the weight of your whole Bible: read it twice and name its two verbs. What does each one guarantee, and to whom must the second one, at minimum, apply? Then verse 27: where does the Church place these words, lightly adapted, at every Mass?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Teaching: the Spirit will lead deeper into what was given. Reminding: the Spirit will guard the memory of what Jesus actually said, and notice the minimum condition: you can only be reminded of what you once heard, so the promise as stated belongs first to the men in that room, the eyewitnesses, and it is the reason the Church has ever trusted that the Gospels, written decades later, carry the authentic memory: the remembering was underwritten by God the Holy Spirit. Hold this; the steelman is next, and this observation is load-bearing. And verse 27, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you: the Church sets these words on the priest's lips at Mass, moments before Communion, in the Missal's adapted wording: Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you. Your group has been praying this chapter weekly since childhood without knowing its address; now they know.

Steelman: The Spirit Will Guide You • But Who Is You?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

Here is the reading much of Protestantism builds on these promises, and it deserves full strength. The Spirit of truth dwells with you, and will be in you (14:17): in you, in every believer, for the Spirit

is given to all the baptized, not to a caste. So when Jesus promises he will teach you all things (14:26) and he will guide you into all truth (16:13), the you, the argument runs, is every Christian with an open Bible and a willing heart. St. John himself seems to say so elsewhere: you have been anointed by the Holy One... you have no need that any one should teach you (1 John 2:27). On this reading, the individual believer, Spirit-indwelt, reading the Spirit-inspired Scriptures, needs no magisterium standing between the soul and the truth; claiming these promises for a hierarchy clericalizes a gift poured out on the whole Church at Pentecost, and quenches the priesthood of all believers. And take the position in its strongest form, not its loosest: almost no serious Protestant claims that each Christian is his own infallible interpreter. The magisterial traditions keep ordained pastors, synods and councils, catechisms and binding confessions of faith, and they read Scripture in and with the Church, not in a vacuum. Their claim is narrower and harder to answer: that Scripture alone is the norm which cannot fail, that every human teaching office is real but fallible and therefore always reformable, and that the Spirit promised in this room ordinarily illumines believers through those ordinary means rather than around them. It is a reading with real texts, real piety, and five hundred years of sincere practice behind it. Let it stand tall.

Question 5 (press from the text). Four probes. First, the address: who, literally, is in the room when every one of these promises is spoken, and what does the reminding promise (14:26) require that only they possess? Second, grant the truth in the steelman: is the Spirit in fact given to every believer, and does the Catholic Church deny it? Third, 1 John 2:27: what is John doing in the very act of writing that sentence, and against whom, in context, is it aimed? Fourth, the test of fruit: what has five centuries of the principle that no teaching office is finally binding actually produced, and can the Spirit of truth be its author?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

First, the address: the upper room holds the Eleven. Every promise is spoken to the apostolic band on their commissioning night, and the reminding promise is the proof of the addressee: bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you can be fulfilled only in men who heard him say it. We were not there; we cannot be reminded of the Bread of Life discourse, we can only receive the memory of those who were, which is precisely what the Gospels are: the apostolic remembrance, underwritten by the Paraclete. The promises as stated point first to that room, and through it to the Gospels and the office that guards the memory (CCC 76-79). Second, grant it entirely: the Spirit is truly given to every believer, dwells in every state of grace, anoints the whole Church with a supernatural instinct for the faith, the *sensus fidei*; Catholicism does not ration the Spirit to a caste, and any Catholic who talks as if it does has misread his own Church. The question was never whether all receive the Spirit but whether all receive this office: the guarded memory and the guidance into all truth were covenanted to the apostolic body, whose successors keep the deposit for everyone (CCC 76-79); one Spirit, two modes of gift, the way one electricity lights every room but the grid has stewards. Third, the delicious irony of 1 John 2:27: the apostle writes you need no one to teach you in a letter that is itself teaching, by an apostle, correcting a specific error; in context the sentence disarms the secessionist false teachers offering secret upgrades, not the apostolic teaching John is at that moment exercising. A verse cannot abolish the office being used to deliver it. Fourth, the fruit test, offered without contempt for the sincere: the private-guidance principle, cut loose from binding communal authority, has produced tens of thousands of communions, each Spirit-claimed, mutually contradicting on Baptism, the Eucharist, and salvation itself, and the Spirit of

truth does not affirm contradictories. And note where the difficulty really sits: not in anyone claiming personal infallibility, which no one does, but in the fact that when every teaching authority is reformable in principle, a contradiction has no court of last appeal and simply hardens into one more communion; the Paraclete's actual promise built something sturdier: a memory that cannot be lost, kept in a body that cannot die, so that the least catechumen inherits the whole. Where the Church is, said Irenaeus, two lifetimes from this upper room, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church. The promises have an address, and the address has a door, and the door is open.

Question 6 (live discovery). Read 15:1-11. Before anything else: what predicate did the board just receive, and what number is it? Hold the ceremony, then dig. Send the group to Psalm 80:8-16, and read Isaiah 5:1-2, 7 aloud over it. Who was the vine, and how did the story go? So what is Jesus claiming with the word TRUE vine? Then the hard verses: what do 15:2 and 15:6 say can happen to branches of mine, and what does that honestly settle? And what is the refrain, ten times in eleven verses, and its Eucharistic echo?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

I am the true vine: the seventh predicate. Stop and hold the ceremony: have the group read the board aloud in order, bread of life, light of the world, the door, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way and the truth and the life, the true vine. Seven, on a tally they built themselves. Then the discovery: the vine was Israel, brought out of Egypt and planted (Psalm 80), the beloved's vineyard given every care that yielded wild grapes (Isaiah 5). True vine is therefore a staggering claim: Jesus is, in his own person, the faithful Israel the vine was always meant to be, the stock that finally bears, and we are grafted into him or we are firewood. Which is what 15:2 and 15:6 say without blinking: every branch of mine, genuinely his, genuinely in the vine, that bears no fruit is taken away, cast forth, withered, burned. Read inductively, the verses settle a live question: real union with Christ, really begun, can really be abandoned; abiding is not automatic, and once saved, always saved cannot survive this vineyard. The remedy is the refrain, *menō*, abide, remain, dwell, ten times, the very word of 14:23's home: stay connected, for apart from me you can do nothing (CCC 2074), not little, nothing. And the deepest abiding this Gospel knows was named at Capernaum in the same vocabulary: he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him (6:56; CCC 1391). St. Cyril drew the line: the Eucharist is how the sap flows. The vine has an altar.

Question 7. Read 15:12-17. Two upgrades and one inversion: what does Jesus rename his disciples, on what grounds, and what does he say about who chose whom? What does that do to the way we usually tell our own faith stories?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

No longer servants but friends, on the grounds of full disclosure: all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you; a servant gets orders, a friend gets the reasons. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends, spoken about eighteen hours before doing it. And the inversion: you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit. Every faith story we tell in the first person, I found God, I decided, I chose, is true the way a child's I climbed into the boat is true: someone was steadying the boat. Election here is not a puzzle about the damned; it is a commission for the chosen: chosen and appointed, for

fruit that abides.

Question 8. Read 15:18-27 and 16:1-4. The forecast darkens: what does Jesus promise his friends about the world, and how far does 16:2 say it will go? Then the third Paraclete promise, 15:26: read it slowly, and listen for a sentence your group recites every Sunday. What did they just find, and, one gentle note, what does whom I shall send add?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The forecast is honest to the point of severity: if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you; a servant is not greater than his master; and 16:2 escalates aposynagōgos to its limit: whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God, a sentence the martyrs of every century, including this one, have verified. He tells them in advance so that when it comes they will not be scandalized: forewarned faith does not shatter. And 15:26: the Counselor... the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me. The Creed wakes up in their hands: who proceeds from the Father is this verse, verbatim, prayed by the group every Sunday of their lives. The gentle note: Jesus also says whom I shall send to you from the Father, the sending from the Son, which the Latin tradition confesses as who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and the Greek Fathers loved as from the Father through the Son, two lungs of one confession (CCC 245-246). One sentence of peace on a topic that once split Christendom, and move on.

Question 9. Read 16:4-15. Start with the sentence nobody in that room could have believed: it is to your advantage that I go away. How can that possibly be true? Then the fourth promise: what three things will the Paraclete convict the world of, what will he guide the apostles into, and, verse 14, what is his job description in one clause? Why does that clause matter for testing every claimed movement of the Spirit since?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

To your advantage, because the Incarnate Lord, in the economy he chose, was in one room at a time; the Spirit he sends will be in believer after believer, room after room, wherever grace is welcomed, forever, and, the hinge the group logged at Tabernacles, the Spirit waits on the glorification: if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come (16:7), the not yet of 7:39 getting its schedule. The conviction: of sin, because they do not believe; of righteousness, because Jesus goes to the Father, vindicated; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged, the verdict of 12:31 prosecuted in every conscience since. The guidance: he will guide you into all truth... and declare to you the things that are to come, the apostolic deposit completed and unfolded. And the job description: he will glorify me. The Spirit is Christ-centripetal: he reminds, deepens, and points at the Son, never freelances past him, which gives the Church her permanent discernment test: any spirit, movement, revelation, or enthusiasm that drifts from Christ, contradicts his remembered words, or glorifies something else, has failed the interview, whatever its energy.

Question 10. Read 16:16-33. Two treasures. First, the image of verse 21: read it slowly and log its key phrase on a familiar board line: whose hour, and what is the Hour being compared to, and what happens to the anguish afterward? Second, the discourse's last sentence, verse 33: what tense is I have overcome, and when is he saying it?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy. Log it on the Hour line: the Hour, which the board knows as appointment and as glory, is now named as labor, the anguish that is itself the mechanism of the joy, the birth-pangs the prophets promised for the age to come. Something is about to be born, and the anguish is how. Say nothing more; next session will stand a Woman beside an anguish, and the group should arrive unwarned. And 16:33: in the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world, perfect tense, completed action with standing results, spoken the night before Golgotha, by a man with hours to live. The outcome is announced before the battle because 10:18 was always true: nothing tomorrow will be taken from him; all of it will be laid down. The Church has carried this sentence through every persecution since, and it has not bent.

DIG DEEPER

The Advocate in court. If the group has energy: Paraklētōs is legal vocabulary, and John means it. In the trials ahead, Jesus will stand effectively alone before Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate. Afterward, his people will stand in courts of their own, out of the synagogues, before the world, and the promise is that they will never stand as he stood: another Advocate will be beside and within them, and the cross-examination of the world will find itself, strangely, the one convicted (16:8-11). Every martyr's calm since Stephen is this promise, kept.

Synthesis question. On his last free night, Jesus built: a road that is himself, an Advocate with four promises, a home in the believer, and a vine with an altar. In one sentence: what is he furnishing his friends for, and what does it is to your advantage that I go demand that we believe about our own era of the story?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He is furnishing them for the time after, the whole age between his going and his coming, our age, and he furnishes it not with nostalgia but with presence: the Spirit within, the Trinity at home in the soul, the sap in the vine, the memory guarded, the peace bequeathed. And to your advantage demands the almost unbelievable: that we are not the deprived generation who missed him, born too late for the voice and the sandals; the Lord himself judged our arrangement, Spirit-indwelt, Eucharist-fed, memory-guarded, the better one. If someone says, we did not miss the story, we live in its best-furnished room, the session has landed. Now send them out with the instruction, given twice: next week is Session 13. Bring your sealed guess. Its Passover has come.

Send

1. Where in your life, name it concretely, are you a branch straining to bear fruit while functionally disconnected from the vine: prayer thin, sacraments rare, effort maximal? What would reconnection actually look like this month?
2. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you. What in your life have you been treating as your own idea that, on reflection, has appointment written all over it?

Live It This Week

- **Vine time.** Ten minutes a day of pure abiding: no requests, no list, just remain. Sit with him the way a branch sits on a vine, silent and connected. Asking can come after; this week, practice staying.
- **Pray to the Person you neglect.** Most Catholics under-pray the Third Person the Lord spent his last night promising. Once a day: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Then name one situation and hand him the case; he is your Advocate.
- **Hear your chapter at Mass.** This Sunday, listen for the moment the priest prays: Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you. That is John 14:27, your chapter, prayed over you. Receive the bequest consciously for once.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, true vine, way and truth and life, you spent your last free night furnishing us for this very evening: an Advocate to teach and remind, a home in us for the Father and yourself, a peace the world cannot counterfeit. We accept the furniture. Keep us on the vine; prune what you must; and let us never again say we were born too late, for you yourself called our age the advantage. In the world we will have tribulation; we are of good cheer anyway, for you have overcome the world. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 15:5

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 12, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 14:1-7** · troubled hearts, many rooms (monai), Thomas, the sixth predicate (14:6)
- **John 14:8-17** · seen me, seen the Father; first Paraclete promise; allos
- **John 14:18-24** · not orphans; make our home with him (monē, 14:23); the dwelling thread interiorizes
- **John 14:25-27** · second promise: teach and remind (14:26); peace I leave with you (the Mass)
- **1 John 2:27** · steelman text, the anointing teaches you; handled in the press
- **John 15:1-11** · the true vine, seventh predicate; airei and kathairei; 15:2 and 15:6 on perseverance; abide ten times; 15:5
- **Psalms 80:8-16** · live discovery, the vine out of Egypt
- **Isaiah 5:1-7** · read aloud, the vineyard song and the wild grapes
- **John 6:56** · cross-reference, eats my flesh abides in me; the Eucharistic abiding (CCC 1391)
- **John 15:12-17** · friends, greater love, you did not choose me
- **John 15:18-27 and 16:1-4** · the world's hatred; third promise, who proceeds from the Father (15:26); aposynagōgos to martyrdom (16:2)
- **Zechariah 13:7** · leader background, the struck shepherd behind 16:32
- **John 16:4-15** · to your advantage; fourth promise: convict, guide into all truth, he will glorify me
- **John 16:16-33** · the woman in travail, her hour (16:21); I have overcome the world (16:33)
- **Isaiah 26:17 and 66:7-14** · leader background, the birth-pangs of the age to come
- **CCC 76-79, 245-246, 1108, 1391, 2074** · Catechism connections

BEHOLD THE LAMB: SESSION 13

Behold Your Mother

John 17-19 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Tonight every thread converges and the seals open. Participants watch the final I AM flatten a cohort in a garden, hear Peter answer it with I am not beside a charcoal fire, and then follow John's clock: sentenced at the sixth hour of Preparation Day, as Jerusalem turned toward the afternoon on which its Passover lambs were slaughtered, given vinegar on a branch of hyssop, finished with the word that completes loved them to the end, and pierced without a bone broken, exactly as Exodus commanded for the lamb. Then, together, the group opens the guesses they sealed thirteen weeks ago, and discovers that the Gospel has been answering them all along.

Catholic Touchstone: The Paschal Lamb (CCC 608), the Church born from the pierced side in blood and water (CCC 766, 1225), and the Mother given from the cross: Woman, behold your son... Behold your mother (CCC 964). And the words every Catholic hears as the Host is raised before Communion, now fully loaded: Behold the Lamb of God.

A Note on Tonight's Format

This is the study's longest reading and its emotional summit. Two recommendations. First, proclaim the Passion (chapters 18 and 19) the way the Church does on Palm Sunday and Good Friday: assign parts in advance, a narrator, a reader for the words of Christ, one or two for the other voices, and read continuously in the blocks marked below, pausing only where the questions fall. Second, confirm at the door that everyone brought their sealed guess from Week One. Have blank slips ready for anyone who forgot theirs; they can write what they remember guessing before the ceremony. The opening of the guesses is the hinge of the night; protect it.

What You Need to Know

Chapter 17, the High Priestly Prayer, is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus, and its opening line fuses the study's two longest threads for the last time: Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son. Three notes to carry in. First, 17:5 reaches back to your first session: glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made, the Prologue praying in the first person. Second, 17:19 names what kind of prayer this is: for their sake I consecrate myself, *hagiazō*, the verb of consecrating priests and victims for sacrifice. In every sacrifice Israel ever offered, priest and victim were two; here, uniquely, the priest consecrates himself as the offering. The title High Priestly Prayer is precise: he is priest and victim at once, and tomorrow's altar is a hill. Third, the unity petitions (17:11, 21-22) your group already weighed in Session 9; collect the receipt briefly, that they may be one as we are one, participation in a unity whose original is essential, and move on. And 17:3 deserves ten seconds of silence: this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. Eternal life defined, and the definition is a relationship.

The arrest (18:1-11) is staged in a garden, and John, who never wastes a set, means it: sin entered the world in a garden, and this Gospel will arrest, bury (19:41), and raise its redeemer in one. Judas arrives leading a cohort with lanterns and torches, hunting the Light of the world with lamps, and Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, steps forward and asks the question that has bracketed this Gospel since its first chapter: whom do you seek? (18:4; compare 1:38). They answer, Jesus of Nazareth, and he says it: *egō eimi*, I AM, and they drew back and fell to the ground (18:6). The final absolute I AM, and its most dramatic: the Name spoken in the dark flattens armed men. No arrest happens in this Gospel until the prisoner permits it; 10:18 governs every verse of the Passion, and Jesus' first use of his untouchability is to shield the sheep: if you seek me, let these men go. Peter's sword, the servant's ear, and the correction: shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me? The cup is accepted before the trial begins.

The denials (18:15-27) contain the Gospel's most devastating verbal irony, and your group's board makes them ready to hear it. The doorkeeper asks Peter, are not you also one of this man's disciples? He said, I am not: *ouk eimi*. While Jesus stands inside answering the high priest, having said *egō eimi* in the garden, Peter stands outside at the fire saying *ouk eimi*, twice (18:17, 25). The counter-melody the Baptist sang in humility, I am not, Peter now sings in fear, and the antiphon of the whole Gospel, I AM against I am not, plays across a courtyard. And the fire: it was cold, and the servants had made a charcoal fire, *anthrakia* (18:18), a word that occurs exactly twice in the entire New Testament. Here, and in one other place this study has not yet reached. Say only: remember this fire. Then the third denial, and at once the cock crowed (18:27), the bird from Session 11, precisely on schedule. John records no weeping; he lets the crow land and cuts away, and the silence is a mercy, because this evangelist knows something about Peter's story that he is saving.

Now the timestamps, which are the hinge of the entire study, so handle them with total precision. First, 18:28: the accusers would not enter the praetorium, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover. On the surface reading of John's clock, weighed honestly in tonight's steelman, the Passover meal is still ahead of them on Friday morning, and the lambs not yet slain. Second, 19:14: now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour, and Pilate said, Behold your King! Two detonations in one verse. The sixth hour: your board has carried a leader-sealed clock since Session 5, for this Gospel contains exactly two sixth hours, a tired man asking a woman for a drink at a well (4:6), and this one; and thirst frames both: the tired ask at the well, and, past the far end of this one, I thirst (19:28). And on the day of Preparation, the sixth hour was the threshold (the temple's own schedule ran earlier than usual when Preparation Day fell on the eve of the Sabbath, m. Pesahim 5:1, though the precise starting hour is debated; what is not debated is that the afternoon belonged to the lambs): from midday the city's ordinary business gave way to the feast, and through the hours that followed the priests slaughtered the Passover lambs for the whole city, thousands of them, all that afternoon. As Jerusalem turns to its lambs, the true Lamb is sentenced in the praetorium, and Israel's chief priests answer Behold your King with the most terrible sentence they ever spoke: we have no king but Caesar, renouncing, at the hour of the lambs, the kingship of God their fathers sang. Pilate's Behold is the study's title verb; the Baptist said Behold the Lamb, Pilate says Behold the man and Behold your King, and John intends every echo. This chronology is also where tonight's steelman lives, because the Synoptics appear to date the Last Supper as the Passover meal itself, and your group deserves the difficulty at full strength before the seals open.

At the cross, John's details are a checklist he expects his reader to grade. The titulus in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek: the languages of covenant, empire, and the world; the Greeks who wished to see Jesus (12:20) can now read the answer posted over his head, and Pilate, like Caiaphas, proclaims truth despite

himself: what I have written I have written. The seamless tunic, woven from top to bottom, dividing which would destroy it: Josephus describes the high priest's robe as a single woven garment without seam, and many Fathers heard the priesthood in the detail; hold it hedged, with Psalm 22:18 quoted in the text. Then 19:25-27, the session's title: standing by the cross, his mother, and the disciple whom he loved. Woman, behold your son... behold your mother. Collect the Cana bracket aloud: the mother of Jesus appears exactly twice in this Gospel, at Cana where he said Woman, my hour has not yet come, and here, where the Hour has come and he says Woman again. And collect 16:21: a Woman, in the anguish of her hour, and something being born, for at the foot of the cross a new family is constituted, the mother and the beloved disciple given to each other, the Church in embryo. The beloved disciple is never named in this Gospel, and the ancient instinct is that the anonymity is a doorway: every disciple Jesus loves is invited to stand in his place and hear behold your mother. And from that hour the disciple took her *eis ta idia*, into his own, his own home, his own life, his own inner keeping. The Church reads here Mary's motherhood of all the beloved disciples (CCC 964); the precise dogmatic contours remain in places undefined, so speak with the Church's warmth and the Church's care, and let St. John Paul II's meditation carry the pastoral weight.

Then the finish, in four moves the group must be allowed to discover. Move one: I thirst (19:28), the thirst that answers the well; the one who asked a broken woman for a drink at Jacob's well now asks creation from the cross, and the Catechism's teaching that his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us (2560) reaches its summit here, with Psalm 69:21's vinegar in the sponge. Move two: the sponge is raised on hyssop (19:29), and hyssop is not a stage prop; it is the Exodus 12:22 instrument, the branch Israel used to apply the lamb's blood to her doorposts, now raised to the lips of the Lamb. Move three: *tetelestai* (19:30), it is finished, it is accomplished, and here the leader opens a seal held since Session 11: the word is the root of 13:1's *eis telos*, he loved them to the end; the Book of Glory opened with love-to-the-telos and closes with the telos declared complete, one telos root, bent from phrase to verb, bracketing the Passion; and having said it, he bowed his head and handed over his spirit, active voice, 10:18 kept to the letter. Move four (19:31-37): the soldiers break the legs of the other two and find Jesus already dead, and John cites the Scripture fulfilled: not a bone of him shall be broken, the wording of the Passover rubric (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12), the evangelist laying the study's answer face up on the table; and a soldier's spear opens his side, and at once there came out blood and water, the living water thread resolved at last (7:38-39, from within him shall flow rivers), the sacramental fountain the Fathers never tired of naming, Baptism and Eucharist from the opened side, the new Eve drawn from the sleeping Adam's side, the Church born (CCC 766, 1225), with Zechariah's they shall look on him whom they have pierced quoted and the eyewitness standing surety: he who saw it has borne witness (19:35). After the group has walked all four moves, and only then, conduct the opening of the guesses; the full ceremony script is in Part 2. Last, the burial (19:38-42): Joseph of Arimathea, and, resolve the arc your group has watched since Session 4, Nicodemus, who had at first come to him by night, now comes publicly, in the open, carrying a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, a royal quantity, to bury the King; the man who came out of the night finished the journey. And the tomb is in a garden: the story that began wrong in a garden is being set right in one, and the garden has one scene left that does not belong to tonight.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Exodus 12:1-13, 21-23, 46, and 12:8.** The Passover lamb entire: without blemish, its blood applied with hyssop, not a bone broken, and, the Session 7 seal now deployable, its flesh eaten. The ceremony's backbone.

- **Isaiah 52:13-53:12.** The servant, lifted up and glorified, led like a lamb to the slaughter (53:7). John quoted 53:1 at 12:38; tonight the neighborhood is unsealed.
- **Genesis 22:1-14.** God will provide himself the lamb (22:8): Isaac carrying the wood up the hill, the Father providing what Abraham's hand was spared. Hedged typology, devastating in the ceremony.
- **Psalms 22:18 and Psalm 69:21.** Garments divided and lots cast; vinegar for my thirst. Quoted in the text itself.
- **Zechariah 12:10.** They shall look on him whom they have pierced, quoted at 19:37, with mourning as for a first-born son.
- **Genesis 2:21-22 and Genesis 3.** The woman drawn from the sleeping man's side; the garden where it all went wrong. Leader background for the pierced side and the garden inclusio.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Melito of Sardis (died c. 180), On the Pascha

Within a lifetime of the beloved disciple's death, Melito preached the oldest surviving Easter homily, and it is one long unsealing of tonight's guesses: it is he who was the Passover of our salvation; he was led like a lamb and slain like a sheep; he ransomed us from the slavery of the world as from the land of Egypt. The lamb of Exodus, Melito says, was the sketch; the Lord is the portrait, and when the portrait arrives the sketch has done its work. The Church was proclaiming Christ as the true Pascha within living memory of the apostles.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Doctor of the Church, Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 120

On the opened side, Augustine reaches back to the first pages of Scripture: the first Adam slept, and from his side God formed the woman; the second Adam slept upon the cross, and from his side flowed the blood and water from which his Bride, the Church, is formed. The evangelist, Augustine notes, chose his verb carefully: the spear did not wound or strike the side but opened it, as one opens a door, and through that opened door flow the sacraments without which there is no entering the life that is true life.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. John Paul II (1920-2005), Redemptoris Mater

On behold your mother, John Paul II lingers over John's phrase that the disciple took her into his own, eis ta idia: not merely into his house, but into everything that makes up his inner life, his discipleship, his interiority. The entrusting is mutual and from the cross: the Mother is given to the disciple, and the disciple to the Mother, and because the beloved disciple stands unnamed, every disciple whom Jesus loves is invited into the same exchange. The pope who took Totus tuus for his motto lived this entrusting as addressed to himself, and taught the Church to do the same.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 608.** The Baptist's Lamb of God reveals Jesus as both the suffering Servant who silently allows himself to be led to the slaughter and the Paschal Lamb, symbol of Israel's redemption at the first Passover. The study's thesis, stated by the Church.

- **CCC 766.** The Church is born primarily of Christ's total self-giving, signified by the blood and water which flowed from the opened side of the crucified Jesus, as Eve was formed from the side of the sleeping Adam.
- **CCC 964.** Mary's union with her Son at the cross, where she stood in keeping with the divine plan, and where Jesus gave her as mother with the words, Woman, behold your son.
- **CCC 1225.** The blood and water from the pierced side as types of Baptism and the Eucharist, the sacraments of new life; from then on it is possible to be born of water and the Spirit.
- **CCC 2605.** The words from the cross gathered as prayer: all the troubles of humanity taken into the dying Son's voice, through to it is finished and the handing over of his spirit.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

TONIGHT NEARLY EVERYTHING RESOLVES. Walk the board before the session and know your payoffs cold: the Hour (kept as appointment, 19:14 and following); I AM (final absolute use, 18:6, the cohort falls; Peter's ouk eimi as the dark antiphon); lifted up and glorified (enacted); the Woman (Cana to cross, 19:26); the Hour as labor (16:21 stands beside 19:25-27: the anguish and the birth); living water (19:34, blood and water); eis telos to tetelestai (13:1 to 19:30, unseal it at the word); Nicodemus (night to daylight, 19:39); the garden (Eden, arrest, burial; one garden scene remains, sealed); the sixth hour (4:6 and 19:14; thirst at the well and thirst on the cross, John timestamping the well and the sentence and letting the second thirst fall past the hour, unseal it at 19:14); and the Lamb, in the ceremony.

The charcoal fire (HOLD). Anthrakia occurs twice in the New Testament: 18:18 and one more place. Say only, remember this fire. The second fire belongs to the final session, and it is worth the wait.

The bridegroom (RESOLVES IN THE CEREMONY). The ceremony's last movement lands the wedding arc: Cana's bridegroom, the bride wooed at the well, the Church born from the side, and the invitation spoken at every Mass, which joins John 1:29 to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Do not spend it early.

Thomas and Peter (HOLD). Thomas is absent tonight and Peter is broken. Both have appointments in Session 14. Promise the group nothing except that the Gospel is not finished with either.

Session Goals

1. Participants hear the final egō eimi flatten the cohort and Peter's ouk eimi answer it across the courtyard.
2. Participants grasp John's chronology precisely: Preparation Day, the sixth hour, the Lamb sentenced as the city turns to the afternoon slaughter of its lambs, and weigh the Synoptic difficulty at full strength.
3. Participants receive behold your mother as addressed to the unnamed disciple, and therefore to themselves, with the Church's warmth and care.

4. Participants walk the four moves of the finish, the thirst, the hyssop, tetelestai, and the unbroken bones with the opened side, and watch John himself cite the Passover lamb's rubric.
5. Participants open their sealed guesses together and receive the full convergence, ending at the words of every Mass: Behold the Lamb of God.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and a single brief Win, 8 minutes. Build with the Passion proclaimed in parts, 55 minutes. THE OPENING OF THE GUESSES, 15 minutes, protected absolutely. Send, Live It, and closing prayer, 12 minutes. Pre-chosen cuts, in order: the seamless tunic discussion (one sentence), the chapter 17 question's unity portion (already covered in Session 9), and the Dig Deeper. Do not cut, under any circumstances: the garden egō eimi, the ouk eimi antiphon, the two timestamps, the steelman, behold your mother, the four moves of the finish, or the ceremony. If the evening threatens to run long, shorten your own commentary, never the text and never the ceremony.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Father, the hour has come. Tonight we walk with your Son from the garden to the garden, from the courtyard fire to the opened side, carrying guesses we sealed thirteen weeks ago. Give us the courage to watch, the honesty to see, and the grace, at the end, to behold. We ask it through Christ our Lord, the Lamb. Amen.

Win (one question only tonight)

1. Have you ever finally understood something you had carried a long time without understanding, a phrase, a gift, an inheritance, a name? What was it like when it opened?

Transition: Hold that feeling. Everyone place your sealed guess on the table in front of you, face down, unopened. It stays there until near the end. Assign the Passion parts now: a narrator, a reader for Christ, one or two for the other voices. We begin with a prayer we are permitted to overhear.

Build (inductive discovery)

Question 1. Read John 17:1-5, 17-19, and 24-26 aloud, slowly. Three catches. Verse 1: which two of our oldest threads fuse in the first sentence? Verse 5: which session of this study is Jesus quoting, so to speak, back to the Father? And verse 19: the verb consecrate is the verb for setting apart priests and victims for sacrifice. In every sacrifice Israel ever offered, those were two different beings. What is Jesus telling us about tomorrow?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son: the Hour and the glory, fused one final time, in prayer. Verse 5, the glory which I had with thee before the world was made, is the Prologue praying in the first person: in the beginning was the Word, spoken now as memory and request. And verse 19: for their sake I consecrate myself. The priest consecrates the victim, and the victim is himself; the High Priestly Prayer is precisely named, and tomorrow's altar is a hill outside the wall. Note also verse 3 and give it silence: eternal life is defined, and the definition is knowing, a relationship, not a location. And the unity petitions the group weighed in Session 9 stand here in their home: that they may be one, even as we are one, the prayer the Church has been both answering and failing ever since, which is why we pray it at every Mass.

Question 2. Proclaim 18:1-11 in parts. Then: where does John stage the arrest, and why might this evangelist care? What question does Jesus ask the mob, and where has this Gospel asked it before? And the moment itself: what exactly does Jesus answer, and what happens to a cohort of armed men when he says it? What does that tell you about every scene that follows tonight?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

A garden. John never names Gethsemane; he says garden, because his story knows where stories go wrong: sin entered in a garden, and this Gospel will arrest its redeemer in one, bury him in one (19:41), and, but that is not tonight. Whom do you seek: the bracket of the whole Gospel, first words to the first disciples, what do you seek (1:38), asked now of the mob with torches, hunting the Light

of the world with lamps. And the answer: egō eimi, I AM, the final absolute use on our tally, and they drew back and fell to the ground: the Name spoken in the dark flattens a cohort. Write the entry and let it stand: no one arrests this man; he is not captured, he surrenders on terms, let these men go, the shepherd shielding sheep with his own untouchability, and the cup is accepted before a single charge is read: shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me? Read every scene tonight through 10:18: nothing will be taken; everything will be laid down.

Question 3. Proclaim 18:15-27 in parts. Listen with the board's ears. The doorkeeper asks Peter if he is a disciple; the Greek of his answer is ouk eimi. Set that against what Jesus just said in the garden, and against a melody the Baptist sang in Session 2. Then two plants come due: what is the fire made of, and what sound ends the scene? And notice what John does not record.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The Gospel's most devastating antiphon: inside, before the high priest, stands the one who said I AM and flattened soldiers; outside, at the fire, his best friend says I am not, ouk eimi, twice. The Baptist said I am not in humility, pointing away from himself to Christ; Peter says it in fear, pointing away from Christ to save himself, the same words, inverted. And the fire: a charcoal fire, anthrakia, a word that appears exactly twice in the entire New Testament, here, and in one more place this study has not reached. Say only this to the group: remember this fire. Then the third denial, and at once the cock crowed: the bird of Session 11, precisely on the schedule the Lord gave. John records no bitter weeping; he lets the crow land and cuts away, and the silence is deliberate, because this evangelist is keeping something for Peter, and it involves the second fire. Not tonight.

Question 4. Proclaim 18:28-40 and 19:1-16 in parts. Two timestamps are the hinge of our whole study; do not let them slip past. First, 18:28: why will the accusers not enter the praetorium, and what does that tell us about where the Passover meal is, on John's clock? Second, 19:14: what day is it, what hour is it, and, unseal a board secret, where has this Gospel given us that hour once before? Then, leader teaches: what began in the temple at that hour on that day? And weigh the last exchange: Behold your King, answered how, by whom?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

They stay outside so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover: on the plain surface of John's clock, Friday morning, the Passover meal is still ahead, and so the lambs not yet slain. Then 19:14: the day of Preparation of the Passover; about the sixth hour. Unseal the clock: this Gospel contains exactly two sixth hours, a tired man asking a Samaritan woman for a drink at Jacob's well (4:6), and this one, and thirst frames both: the tired ask at the well, and, past the far end of this one, I thirst (19:28). And the sixth hour of Preparation Day is the threshold: from midday the feast took over the city, and through the afternoon that followed the priests slaughtered the Passover lambs for all Jerusalem, thousands upon thousands. As the city turns to its lambs, the true Lamb is sentenced in the praetorium. Pilate cries Behold your King, the study's own verb, behold, and Israel's chief priests answer with the most terrible sentence they ever spoke: we have no king but Caesar, renouncing the kingship of God at the very hour of the lambs. Every detail is now load-bearing, which is exactly why the strongest objection to John's clock deserves its hearing before we go one verse further.

Steelman: Do John and the Synoptics Contradict on the Date?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

The skeptical case is serious and centuries old. Mark says plainly: on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the passover lamb, the disciples prepared, and that evening Jesus ate the Last Supper (Mark 14:12-17); in the Synoptics, the Last Supper is the Passover meal, and Jesus dies the following afternoon, after the lambs. John, as we have just seen, has the meal still future on Friday morning (18:28) and Jesus sentenced at the sixth hour of Preparation Day (19:14), dying as the lambs die. Both cannot be right, the argument runs; and since John's dating produces perfect lamb symbolism, the obvious conclusion is that John moved the date for theology, history bent to make a point, and if he bent this, the eyewitness claims of 19:35 and 21:24 bend with it. The whole edifice our sealed guesses are about to celebrate, the critic says, is built on an adjusted clock. State it without flinching; the difficulty is real, ancient, and acknowledged by believing scholars.

Question 5 (press from the text). Four probes. First, honesty: is the difficulty real, and does faith require pretending otherwise? Second, the calendar question: was there only one way to reckon Passover in first-century Judea? Third, the oldest witness: a decade or two before any Gospel was written, what did St. Paul already call Christ, in 1 Corinthians 5:7? Fourth: does an eyewitness with a theological pen stop being an eyewitness?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

First, yes, the tension is real, and Catholic scholarship says so out loud; pretending otherwise builds faith on sand, and this study has never done that with manuscripts, authorship, or anything else. Second, no: first-century Judea, on serious reconstructions, ran more than one liturgical clock. Pharisees and Sadducees are on record disputing festal reckonings; some scholars have argued that Galileans and Judeans reckoned the day differently, though that reconstruction is contested; and the Essenes of Qumran kept a 364-day solar calendar on which Passover fell on a fixed weekday. On several proposed reconstructions, none of them demonstrated and all of them debated, Jesus ate a true Passover meal by an earlier legitimate reckoning, exactly as the Synoptics describe, and died as the temple's official lambs were slain, exactly as John describes, both clocks true, one Lord bridging them. Others note that eat the passover in 18:28 can denote the festival's continuing sacrificial meals, not only the seder. The Church has defined none of these solutions, and honesty holds them with open hands. Third, and decisively for the symbolism charge: Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed, wrote St. Paul to Corinth around the year 56, before, on standard datings, any Gospel had been written. The Lamb identification is not John's late invention requiring an adjusted clock; it is the Church's primal confession, earlier than the Gospels' standard dates, and John's chronology at most sharpens what the whole apostolic generation already proclaimed. Fourth: John timestamps with named pools, named porticoes, named officials, and archaeology has corroborated named details, Bethesda's porticoes and Siloam among them; a witness who selects and arranges true details to show their meaning is called an author, not a fabricator, and every evangelist, every historian, and every one of us telling our own conversion story does the same. On any of these honest readings, the clock is no fabrication, and the witness stands. Now we may go to the cross.

Question 6. Proclaim 19:17-24 in parts. Two details to weigh briefly. The titulus: what three languages, and, remember who came asking in chapter 12, who can read it now? And Pilate's refusal to amend it:

whose pattern is he unknowingly repeating? Then the tunic: what is odd about it, and what garment does the oddity recall?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Hebrew, Latin, and Greek: covenant, empire, and the world. The Greeks who said we wish to see Jesus can now read the proclamation posted over his head, in their own tongue: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. And what I have written I have written places Pilate beside Caiaphas in the Gospel's gallery of accidental prophets: the truth keeps getting proclaimed by its enemies, on schedule. The tunic is without seam, woven from top to bottom, indivisible except by destruction, and Josephus describes the high priest's robe in nearly the same words; many Fathers heard the priesthood of the crucified in the soldiers' dice game, with Psalm 22:18 quoted underneath. Hold it lightly and move; the mother is waiting.

Question 7. Proclaim 19:25-27, and then be quiet for a moment before asking anything. Now: the mother of Jesus appears exactly twice in this entire Gospel. Where was the first time, what did he call her there, and what did he say about the Hour? What does he call her now that the Hour has come? Set 16:21 beside this scene: what did Jesus say about a woman, anguish, and her hour? And the disciple: why might this Gospel never give him a name, and what did he do from that hour?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Cana and Calvary: Woman, my hour has not yet come, and now, in the Hour itself, Woman, behold your son. The bracket the group has carried since Session 3 closes: the Woman stands at both ends of the Hour, and the evangelist who rewrote Genesis in his first sentence knew what the word Woman weighs, the mother of all the living standing at the tree. And 16:21 stands beside her: when a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come, but joy follows the birth. At the foot of the cross, in the anguish of the Hour, something is being born: a new family, the mother and the disciple given to each other, the Church in embryo, drawn into existence by the dying breath of her Lord. And the disciple is never named, and the Church's oldest instinct is that the anonymity is a doorway: every disciple whom Jesus loves is invited to stand in his place, hear behold your mother addressed personally, and do what he did: from that hour the disciple took her into his own, eis ta idia, not merely into his house but into everything that makes up his life, as St. John Paul II loved to say. The Church reads Mary's motherhood of all beloved disciples here (CCC 964); receive her, and let anyone in the room who has never known what to do with Mary hear it simply: she was a gift, given from the cross, in the last will of a dying man, and refusing bequests from that particular will is not our custom.

Question 8 (live discovery). Proclaim 19:28-30. Three moves, walk them slowly. Move one: I thirst; where has this Gospel shown us his thirst before, and at what hour? Move two: the sponge is raised on what kind of branch? Send half the group to Exodus 12:21-23 right now and ask them: what was hyssop for? Move three: the final word, one word in Greek, tetelestai; the leader now opens a seal held since Session 11: what phrase in 13:1 shares its root, and what does the bracket mean? And the last clause: what does he do with his spirit, and which verse of chapter 10 is being kept?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Move one: the well. At the sixth hour of chapter 4 he sat thirsty and asked a broken woman, give me

a drink, and the Catechism says his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us (2560); now, at the far end of the other sixth hour, he thirsts aloud from the cross, and the desire is the same desire: us. Psalm 69's vinegar comes up in the sponge. Move two: hyssop, and the group has just read what hyssop is: the branch Israel dipped in the blood of the Passover lamb to apply it to her doorposts, so that death would pass over. The blood applicator of Exodus 12 is raised to the lips of the Lamb, and John names the plant because he expects his reader to know the rubric. Move three: tetelestai, it is finished, accomplished, completed, and the seal: 13:1 said he loved his own eis telos, to the end, to completion, and 19:30 declares the telos reached; one root, telos, deliberately echoed, brackets the entire Book of Glory: loved to the end, and the end is now finished. What is finished? The Scriptures, the Passover, the Hour, the work the Father gave, and the love, which turned out to have no point at which it said this far and no further. And then: he bowed his head and handed over his spirit, active voice, a giver to the last breath. No one took his life. He laid it down (10:18), exactly as he said, and even the dying was a deed.

Question 9 (live discovery). Proclaim 19:31-37. The soldiers break the legs of the two others and find Jesus already dead. John says Scripture was fulfilled: not a bone of him shall be broken. Send the other half of the group to Exodus 12:46 and read it aloud to everyone. Whose rubric is that, and who is telling us it has been kept? Then the spear: what flows from the opened side, which of our oldest threads just resolved, and what did the Fathers, and the Catechism, see flowing? And verse 35: on whose word does all of this rest?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Exodus 12:46 is the Passover lamb's own rubric: you shall not break a bone of it, and the one telling us it has been kept in Jesus' body is the evangelist himself, quoting the Scripture whose home is the Passover rubric (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12, with Psalm 34:20 in harmony), laying the study's answer face up on the table. John has stopped hinting. Then the spear opened his side, Augustine noted the verb, opened, like a door, and at once there came out blood and water: the living water thread, planted at a well, cried at Tabernacles, glossed as the Spirit awaiting the glorification, resolves here; out of his heart flow rivers (7:38), now that he is glorified, and the Fathers and the Catechism name the streams: the water of Baptism and the blood of the Eucharist, the sacramental life of the Church, flowing from the opened side (CCC 1225), the new Eve drawn from the side of the sleeping Adam, the Church born at the cross (CCC 766). Zechariah is quoted over the scene: they shall look on him whom they have pierced. And verse 35: he who saw it has borne witness, his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth. An eyewitness, standing close enough to see the two streams, staking his Gospel on it. Now, and only now, tell everyone to pick up their sealed guess.

THE OPENING OF THE GUESSES

CEREMONY: conduct this without hurry

Everyone holds their sealed guess from Week One. Say: thirteen weeks ago, before you knew anything, you wrote your answer to one question: why is Jesus called the Lamb of God? Open them now. Go around the circle; each person reads their guess aloud, exactly as written, no editing, no apologizing. Honor every guess; most will contain real fragments of the answer. When the circle

completes, walk the convergence, counting on your fingers, slowly:

One: the Baptist cried Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, and never explained it, and neither did we. Two: John counted Passovers, three of them, the whole Gospel running on a Passover clock. Three: at the second Passover, Jesus said the bread which I shall give is my flesh, and would not soften it, because, hear now what was sealed since Session 7, the Passover lamb of Exodus 12 was not merely slain; the command was, they shall eat the flesh (Exodus 12:8); a Passover you did not eat was a Passover you did not keep. Four: Isaiah sang of a servant lifted up and glorified, led like a lamb to the slaughter (53:7), and John began quoting that very song as the Hour turned. Five: the sentence fell at the sixth hour of Preparation Day, as the city turned to the afternoon-long slaughter of its lambs. Six: the sponge came up on hyssop, the lamb's-blood applicator of the first Passover. Seven: not a bone of him was broken, the lamb's own rubric, cited by the eyewitness himself. Eight: and reach all the way back, when Isaac carried the wood up the hill and asked his father where the lamb was, Abraham answered, God will provide himself the lamb (Genesis 22:8); Abraham's hand was stayed, and the promise waited two thousand years for a Father who would not stay his own; hold it with open hands, and let it break your heart. Nine: the blood of the first lambs was applied to doorposts so that death would pass over; the blood of this Lamb is applied to people, and death itself passes over into life. Ten, and stand for this one if your group will bear it: at every single Mass, at the invitation to Communion, the priest raises the Host and says the Baptist's unexplained cry, Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world, and then joins it to the wedding this whole Gospel has been planning since Cana, blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb. The bridegroom of Cana, the bride wooed at the well, the Church born from the opened side, and the marriage supper announced over every altar on earth: the study's two great arcs are one arc, and you are invited to the wedding, this Sunday, and the Lamb, as at the first Passover, is not merely beheld. He is eaten. Your guesses were sealed for thirteen weeks. The Church's answer has been in plain sight at every Mass of your life.

Question 10. One scene remains tonight. Proclaim 19:38-42. Two men bury Jesus. The second one: who is he, what is he carrying, how much of it, and, check the board, when did we first meet him, at what time of day, and what were we told to watch for? And where is the tomb?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Nicodemus, who had at first come to him by night. The board has watched this man since Session 4: by night with careful questions (chapter 3), a lone procedural voice in the council (7:50), and now publicly, in the open, with the death sentence still warm, he comes to bury the condemned man, carrying a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, a burial fit for a king, an unmissable public act. The man who came out of the night finished the journey into the light, exactly as 3:21 promised: he who does what is true comes to the light. The arc resolves; let the group applaud him a little, he has earned it across ten weeks of their watching. And the tomb is in a garden: the story that began to go wrong in a garden is being set right in one, arrest in a garden, burial in a garden, and, say only this, gardens in this Gospel are not finished. Bring nothing next week but yourselves. It is the last session, and it begins before dawn.

DIG DEEPER

The daily lambs. For the week's pondering: besides the Passover, the temple offered a lamb every

morning and every evening, the tamid, the continual offering (Exodus 29:38-42), so that a lamb was always on the altar for Israel. The Lamb of God takes up even this: the Church has loved to see in her daily Mass the tamid's fulfillment: not new sacrifices multiplied, but the one sacrifice made present without lapse, morning and evening, until he comes.

Synthesis question. Simply this, and let everyone answer: this Sunday, just before Communion, the priest will raise the Host and say the words. What will you hear now that you could not hear fourteen weeks ago?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Let every person answer in their own words and resist the urge to improve on them. You are listening for the study's whole cargo arriving in the present tense: the Baptist's cry, the three Passovers, the hard saying at Capernaum, the sixth hour, the hyssop, the unbroken bones, the opened side, the wedding invitation, and a sealed guess thirteen weeks old finally answered by the Church's oldest sentence. If someone says, I will hear the whole Gospel of John in one sentence, or simply, I will actually behold, then the study has done what it was built to do, and there is exactly one session left, because the Lamb, as it turns out, is not finished speaking.

Send

1. You now know what Behold the Lamb of God costs and contains. Concretely, what will be different about your next Communion, your preparation, your Amen, your thanksgiving after?
2. The beloved disciple stands unnamed, the Church has always noticed, as if to leave room for you, and from the cross you were handed a mother. Honestly: will you take her eis ta idia, into your own, and what would that look like in your actual week?

Live It This Week

- **Behold, knowing everything.** This Sunday, when the priest raises the Host before Communion and says Behold the Lamb of God, behold: look at the Host with everything you now know, the hyssop, the bones, the sixth hour, the opened side, and make your Lord, I am not worthy the most honest sentence of your week. Then go to the supper of the Lamb.
- **Take her into your own.** Every day this week, pray the Memorare, or one decade of the Rosary, as your act of accepting the bequest of 19:27. She was given to you from the cross; a week of daily hello is the least a son or daughter can do.
- **Ten minutes at the foot.** Once this week, sit before a crucifix, at church or at home, and read John 19:25-37 slowly at its foot. Stop at the hyssop, stop at tetelestai, stop at the opened side. You have never read it as the person you are now; go find out who that is.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, we sealed our guesses and you kept your secret, and tonight you opened both. You were slain at the hour of the lambs, lifted on the wood Isaac carried, given vinegar on the branch that once painted doorposts with blood, and not one of your bones was broken. From your opened side you gave us the font and the chalice, and from your cross you gave us your mother. It is finished; and we are only beginning to understand. Behold us, Lamb

of God, as we have finally learned to behold you. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE AGAIN: John 1:29

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (RSV2CE)

You memorized this verse in Week Two, when it was a mystery. Say it every day this week, now that it is not. They are the same words; you are not the same reader.

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 13, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session, and flag the Exodus passages twice.

- **John 17:1-5, 17-19, 24-26** · the High Priestly Prayer: the Hour and glory, pre-existent glory, I consecrate myself, eternal life defined (17:3)
- **John 18:1-11** · the garden, whom do you seek, the final egō eimi (18:6), the cup
- **John 18:15-27** · ouk eimi twice, the charcoal fire (anthrakia), the cock crow
- **John 18:28-40** · that they might eat the passover; kingship not of this world; what is truth
- **John 19:1-16** · the mock coronation, behold the man, Preparation Day, the sixth hour (19:14), no king but Caesar
- **Mark 14:12-17** · steelman text, the Synoptic dating; cite or read aloud in the steelman
- **1 Corinthians 5:7** · press text, Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed, older than all Gospels
- **John 19:17-24** · the titulus in three languages, the seamless tunic, Psalm 22:18 in text
- **John 19:25-27** · BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER: the Woman, the disciple, eis ta idia; set 16:21 beside it
- **John 19:28-30** · I thirst (compare 4:6-7), the hyssop, tetelestai (compare 13:1), handed over his spirit
- **Exodus 12:21-23** · live discovery, hyssop and the blood on the doorposts
- **John 19:31-37** · the unbroken bones, the opened side, blood and water, Zechariah 12:10, the eyewitness (19:35)
- **Exodus 12:46** · live discovery, you shall not break a bone of it; cited by John himself (19:36)
- **Exodus 12:8** · CEREMONY: they shall eat the flesh; the Session 7 seal, deployed at last
- **Isaiah 53:7 and 52:13** · CEREMONY: the lamb led to slaughter; lifted up and glorified
- **Genesis 22:1-14** · CEREMONY: God will provide himself the lamb; hedged, and devastating
- **Exodus 29:38-42** · Dig Deeper, the tamid, the daily lambs
- **Revelation 19:9** · CEREMONY: blessed are those called to the marriage supper of the Lamb; joined to John 1:29 at every Mass
- **John 19:38-42** · Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus in daylight; the garden tomb
- **CCC 608, 766, 964, 1225, 2560, 2605** · Catechism connections

BEHOLD THE LAMB: SESSION 14

That You May Believe

John 20-21 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants watch every remaining thread come home: the Gospel's first question asked one last time in a garden at dawn, the sheep called by name, the breath of Genesis breathed again, Thomas completing the sentence the Prologue opened, a beatitude addressed directly to everyone in the room, a second charcoal fire, and a promissory note from Session 2 paid in full beside it: feed my sheep. The study ends where discipleship begins: follow me.

Catholic Touchstone: The risen Lord institutes the sacrament of Penance with the breath of the new creation (20:22-23; CCC 1461), accepts the Gospel's climactic act of worship, my Lord and my God (CCC 448), entrusts his whole flock to Peter (21:15-17; CCC 553, 881), and pronounces the beatitude the whole Church lives inside: blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

A Note on Tonight's Format

This is the final session. Three logistics. First, bring the board, or a written reconstruction of it: every thread, both tallies, all seven predicates; the closing ceremony walks the finished board end to end, and it is the study's valediction. Second, plan food. The risen Lord's own gesture in chapter 21 is making breakfast for tired friends, and the fitting end to fourteen weeks together is a shared meal, tonight after the session or at a breakfast this week; announce it during Live It. Third, end on time and end warm: the last word of the Gospel to Peter is follow me, and the group should leave with it ringing rather than buried under a long goodbye.

What You Need to Know

Chapter 20 opens while it was still dark, and your light and darkness thread should hear it: the Gospel that plunged into night at 13:30 begins its final movement in the last of the dark, with dawn coming. Mary Magdalene finds the stone moved and runs; Peter and the beloved disciple run back, and John gives us the footrace with an eyewitness's pride: the other disciple outran Peter, waited at the entrance, and let Peter go in first. Love arrives first; Peter enters first: the pairing planted at the supper table is now choreography, intimacy and office deferring to each other at a tomb door. What they find is the Gospel's first resurrection evidence, and it is laundry: the linen cloths lying there, and the napkin, the *soudarion* that had been on his head, not lying with the cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Grave robbers do not undress a corpse, nor leave the face-cloth rolled apart in its own place. The scene says order, unhurried, deliberate: whatever happened here happened from the inside. And then the quiet astonishment of 20:8: the beloved disciple saw and believed, the first recorded believer in the resurrection of Jesus, and he believed without an appearance, on the evidence of burial cloths read with love's attention, a fact that will matter enormously when the chapter reaches its beatitude.

Mary's recognition scene (20:11-18) is the most tender writing in the Gospel, and nearly every sentence is a thread landing. The question: woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek? The bracket the

group has tracked since Session 2 closes here: what do you seek (1:38), whom do you seek (18:4), whom do you seek (20:15), the seek-question sounding for the last time, asked now by the risen Lord to a weeping woman. She supposes him to be the gardener, and John's crowning irony is that her mistake, the Fathers loved to say, tells the truth: in a garden mankind fell when its first gardener failed his trust, and in a garden the new Adam stands at dawn, the Gardener restored, tending what Eden lost. Then one word: Mary. The Good Shepherd calls his own sheep by name (10:3), and the group planted that verse five sessions ago; the payoff is a single spoken name that turns a stranger into Rabboni. The *noli me tangere*, do not hold me, is not rejection but redirection: I am ascending, the old mode of holding him is ending and a new one is coming, and Catholic hearts run straight to the altar where the ascended Lord still gives himself to be received. And the commission: go to my brethren, the first time in this Gospel Jesus calls the disciples brothers, the new family constituted at the cross already growing, and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father. Mary Magdalene becomes, in the Church's ancient phrase that St. Thomas Aquinas loved, the *apostolorum apostola*, the apostle to the apostles. One apologetic note worth giving plainly: in the first century a woman's testimony carried little legal weight, and an inventor had little to gain by placing women first at the tomb; the detail reads like memory, not craft.

The evening appearance (20:19-23) is dense with institution, and tonight's steelman lives in it. Peace be with you, twice: the bequest of 14:27 delivered in person by its testator. He shows them his hands and his side: the risen body keeps its wounds, glorified, not erased, the identity of the Crucified and the Risen One being the whole gospel in his skin. Then the sending: as the Father has sent me, even so I send you, the apostolic mission given its full weight, and then the act your group is equipped to hear like first-century Jews: he breathed on them. The verb is *enephsēsen*, and in the Greek Old Testament it is the verb of Genesis 2:7, the LORD God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Twice in all of Scripture God breathes on men: once to make Adam live, and once, here, to make this ministry live. The group met Genesis 2:7 in Session 9, at the clay on a blind man's eyes; tonight the Creator's breath returns for the new creation. And what the breath creates is stated: receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. The Church has always heard here the institution of the sacrament of Penance (CCC 1461; Trent defined it), and Augustine's unbind him from Session 10 finds its charter. Prepare the steelman with full seriousness; the objection is sincere, widespread, and answerable from the verse's own grammar.

Thomas (20:24-29) completes the Gospel's deepest structure. The group met him gloomy and loyal (let us also go, that we may die with him, 11:16) and honest (we do not know the way, 14:5); he was absent for the first appearance and refuses secondhand joy: unless I see... I will never believe. Eight days later, note the liturgical rhythm, the following Sunday, Jesus comes for one man's doubt and offers exactly the evidence demanded: put your finger here. And Thomas answers with the sentence this entire Gospel was built to reach: my Lord and my God, *ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou*. Unseal the reserve your Session 2 press has held for twelve weeks: the Gospel opened, the Word was God (1:1), and it closes with a man confessing my God to Jesus' face, the *inclusio* complete, the frame closed, and Jesus does not correct him; he blesses him, and then pronounces the beatitude over everyone who was not in that room: blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. The sign-faith thread, running since 2:23, resolves on your group personally: they are the ones the beatitude describes, fourteen weeks of believing without seeing, and the beloved disciple already modeled it at the tomb. Then the purpose statement (20:30-31), and two payoffs at once: these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, which is Martha's confession (11:27) nearly verbatim, the grieving woman at the tomb having spoken the Gospel's thesis four chapters early, exactly as your Session 10 note promised; and many other signs, not written, the evangelist tipping his hat to every argument your sign tally ever hosted.

Chapter 21 is the epilogue of restoration. Seven disciples fish all night and catch nothing, and 15:5 hums underneath: apart from me you can do nothing, demonstrated commercially. At dawn, the stranger on the beach, the command to cast on the right side, and a catch too heavy to haul: one hundred and fifty-three large fish, and the net was not torn. Hold the number lightly, the Fathers played with it endlessly, Jerome mentioning a tradition of 153 species of fish, the catch as all the nations, and the untorn net beside the seamless tunic as John's two images of a unity that must not be divided; the certain point is mission and abundance at the Lord's word. The pairing performs one last time: it is the Lord, the beloved disciple sees first; Peter, girding himself, jumps in the water, love recognizes and Peter acts. And on the beach: a charcoal fire, *anthrakia*, the word's second and final New Testament appearance, the plant from Session 13 paying off. The last time Peter stood at a charcoal fire he said I am not, three times, and Jesus has rebuilt the set: the same kind of fire lighting Peter's face, and this time the questions come from the Lord. Simon, son of John, do you love me? Three denials; three questions; three confessions; the wound reopened precisely so it can be healed clean. The famous verb variation, Jesus asking with *agapas* twice and Peter answering with *philō*, and Jesus asking the third time with Peter's own *phileis*, has been read both as the Lord stooping to meet Peter where his honesty can reach, and as simple Johannine synonym variation; the Fathers and the scholars divide, so hold it hedged and preach the certain thing: the threefold structure, and what each answer receives. Feed my lambs; tend my sheep; feed my sheep. The Good Shepherd, who owns the flock (my sheep), hands its care to Peter, and Session 2's promissory note, you shall be called Cephas, is paid at last: the rename discharges into an office, the shepherding of Ezekiel 34 delegated (CCC 553: the risen Jesus entrusted his sheep to Peter; CCC 881). Then the cost: when you are old, you will stretch out your hands... showing by what death he was to glorify God, and Peter's boast from 13:37, I will lay down my life for you, borrowed then from 10:11 and unearned, is finally underwritten: he will lay it down, decades hence, in the death tradition remembers as crucifixion. And the command that ends the Gospel's story: follow me, said twice (21:19, 22), with the comparison to the beloved disciple's different path forbidden in between: if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me. Every vocation is its own. The last verses seal the witness: this is the disciple who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true, and the world itself could not contain the books. Then conduct the closing ceremony: the board, complete.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Genesis 2:7.** The LORD God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: the only other divine breathing in Scripture, echoed verbatim at 20:22. Read aloud at the breath.
- **Genesis 2-3.** The garden, and the gardener who failed his trust. Leader background for Mary's beautiful mistake.
- **Ezekiel 34:15, 23.** I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep... my servant shall feed them: the shepherding, fulfilled in Jesus in Session 9, now delegated to Peter. Callback, not new lookup.
- **Psalms 30:5.** Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. Optional read-aloud over the Magdalene scene.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Gregory the Great (c. 540-604), Doctor of the Church, Homilies on the Gospels, Homily 26

On Thomas, Gregory refuses to scold: the disbelief of Thomas, he preaches, has done more for our faith than the belief of the other disciples, for as he touches and is convinced, our own minds are

settled past doubting. Do you suppose it was by chance that this chosen disciple was absent, then came and heard, heard and doubted, doubted and touched, touched and believed? It was not chance but divine arrangement: the doubter's hand in the wounds healed the wound of our unbelief.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Doctor of the Church, Commentary on the Gospel of John, on chapter 20

Aquinas gives Mary Magdalene the Church's ancient title with full honors: apostolorum apostola, the apostle of the apostles. As a woman first brought the words of death to a man in Eden, he observes with the Fathers, so a woman is first entrusted with the words of life at the tomb: go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending. The order of the fall is reversed in the order of the announcement, and the first human voice ever to preach the resurrection was hers.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), Doctor of the Church, Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homily 88

On the beach, Chrysostom hears what the threefold question is for: Jesus asks nothing about the denial, exacts no accounting of the courtyard; he asks only, do you love me, because love is the one qualification he examines for what comes next. And the proof of love he appoints is not tears or vigils but the care of the flock: if you love me, tend my sheep, take charge of your brethren. The love of Christ, Chrysostom says, is verified in shepherding what Christ loves; Peter's penance is a job, and the job is love made visible until his own stretched-out hands complete it.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1461.** Christ entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to his apostles: receive the Holy Spirit; if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. Bishops and priests continue to exercise this ministry; the sacrament of Penance stands on tonight's verse.
- **CCC 976.** The Apostles' Creed ties the forgiveness of sins to this scene: the risen Lord conferred on the apostles his own divine power to forgive.
- **CCC 448.** Thomas' my Lord and my God as the Church's own confession before the risen Christ, cited by the Catechism as the pattern of adoring faith.
- **CCC 644-645.** The risen body: the same body that was crucified, bearing the marks of the Passion, now glorified, not a ghost and not a resuscitation.
- **CCC 553 and 881.** The risen Jesus entrusted his sheep to Peter: the pastoral office of binding, loosing, and feeding the whole flock, the payoff of you shall be called Cephas.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

FINAL SESSION: EVERYTHING LANDS. Know the payoffs cold: whom do you seek (1:38, 18:4, 20:15, bracket closed); light and darkness (still dark, then dawn on the beach); the garden (Eden, arrest, tomb, and the Gardener recognized); sheep called by name (10:3, one word: Mary); the breath (Genesis 2:7 at 20:22); unbind him (Session 10) chartered at 20:23; the I AM inclusio (1:1 to 20:28, the Session 2 reserve paid); sign-faith resolved on the group itself (20:29); Martha's creed as

the purpose statement (11:27 to 20:31); the tally honored by the author (20:30); the charcoal fire (18:18 to 21:9); the Cephas note paid (1:42 to 21:15-17); Peter's boast underwritten (13:37 to 21:18-19); Thomas (11:16 to 20:28); and the untorn net beside the seamless tunic.

The closing ceremony. After the last Build question, walk the finished board aloud, thread by thread, start to finish, letting group members narrate the threads they remember best. Fourteen weeks of architecture deserves fourteen minutes of victory lap. End the walk at the two words the Gospel ends its story with: follow me.

The Lamb, standing. One grace note for the very end, from the Johannine Revelation (in the Church's traditional attribution), the throne vision shows a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain (Revelation 5:6). Standing: alive; as though slain: the marks retained, like the hands and side of 20:20. The Lamb your group beheld is not a past tense. He is standing, wounds and all, and every Mass looks at him.

Session Goals

1. Participants watch the whom-do-you-seek bracket close, hear the sheep called by name, and receive the gardener's irony as the new creation's announcement.
2. Participants connect the breath of 20:22 to Genesis 2:7 and hear 20:23 with its full institutional weight, having weighed the declarative reading at full strength.
3. Participants witness the 1:1 to 20:28 inclusio complete in Thomas' confession, and receive 20:29's beatitude as addressed to themselves.
4. Participants stand at the second charcoal fire, watch the threefold restoration pay the Cephas note into the office of feeding the sheep, and hear Peter's boast finally underwritten.
5. Participants walk the completed board, and leave with the Gospel's last command to Peter ringing as their own: follow me.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and one Win, 8 minutes. Build, 55 minutes. THE BOARD, COMPLETE, 12 minutes, protected. Send, Live It, closing prayer, and the announcement of the celebration meal, 15 minutes. Pre-chosen cuts, in order: the 153-fish discussion (one sentence: mission, abundance, and an untorn net), Psalm 30:5, and the Dig Deeper. Do not cut: the race and the cloths, the Magdalene scene, the breath with the steelman, Thomas with the beatitude, the second fire with the threefold restoration, or the board walk. If anything must shrink, shrink your commentary; the texts tonight need almost no help.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, it is still dark, and we are running to the tomb one last time together. For fourteen weeks you have called us by name, fed us, washed us, and let us watch you love to the end. Tonight, finish what you began in us: let us see, and believe, and hear the last thing you said to Peter as said to us. We ask it through you, our Lord and our God. Amen.

Win (one question only tonight)

1. What is the best reunion you have ever been part of, the kind where someone thought lost came back? What was the first moment of recognition like?

Transition: The Gospel's last movement begins while it is still dark, in a garden, with a woman weeping at the wrong conclusion. Bring the board where everyone can see it; it earns its retirement tonight.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 20:1-10 aloud. Then ask:

Question 1. Note the clock in the first verse for the board's oldest line. Then the footrace: who outruns whom, who waits, who enters first, and what does the choreography of these two men, running since a supper table, quietly say? And the evidence they find: describe it exactly. What does that arrangement rule out, and what does verse 8 say the beloved disciple did, on the strength of what?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

While it was still dark: the Gospel that fell into night at 13:30 opens its finale in the last of the darkness, with dawn on the way; the light and darkness line is about to end in morning. The race: the beloved disciple outruns Peter, and then waits, and lets Peter enter first. Love arrives first; office enters first; intimacy defers to authority and authority is beaten to every tomb by love: the Church has been running this two-man race ever since, and both runners are necessary. The evidence: the linen cloths lying there, and the face-cloth not with them but rolled up in a place by itself. Grave robbers do not unwrap a corpse, and nobody in a hurry rolls a cloth and sets it apart; the scene testifies to order, unhurried, from the inside. And verse 8: he saw and believed, resurrection faith's first recorded dawn, and it happened without an appearance, on the evidence of burial cloths read with love's attention. Hold that fact; a beatitude at the end of this chapter will want it.

Question 2. Read 20:11-18, slowly; nearly every line is one of our threads landing. Count the landings with the board in view: the question Jesus asks her, and where this Gospel has asked it before, first and latest; her mistake about his identity, and why, in a Gospel that began by rewriting Genesis, the mistake is actually the truth; the one word that opens her eyes, and which verse of chapter 10 it keeps; and her commission, with the title the Church gave her for it.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Whom do you seek: the bracket closes. The Gospel's first words from Jesus were what do you seek (1:38); in the garden of arrest, whom do you seek (18:4); and now, risen, to a weeping woman, whom do you seek (20:15), the seek-question's final return across the whole book, and it is still the

question. The gardener: she is wrong and she is right, John's crowning irony. Humanity fell in a garden under a gardener who failed his trust; at dawn in a garden stands the new Adam, the Gardener restored, tending what Eden lost, and the tomb is empty behind him. Then one word: Mary. The Good Shepherd calls his own sheep by name (10:3), and the verse the group logged five sessions ago is kept in a single spoken name; she turns, and the stranger is Rabboni. Do not hold me is redirection, not rejection: the ascended Lord will be held a new way, and Catholic hearts go straight to the altar where. And the commission: go to my brethren, the first brethren of the Gospel, the family born at the cross already growing, making Mary Magdalene what Aquinas and the tradition call her, apostolorum apostola, the apostle to the apostles: the first human voice ever to announce the resurrection was a woman's, a detail an inventor had little reason to choose, and one the tradition never smoothed away.

Question 3 (live discovery). Read 20:19-23. Inventory the evening: what does he say twice, and where did our study last hear that bequest? What does he show them, and what does it mean that the risen body kept them? Then the sending, and the act: he breathed on them. Send the group to Genesis 2:7 and read it aloud. How many times in all of Scripture does God breathe on human beings, and what did each breath create? Then read verse 23 once more and hold it; its own argument comes next.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Peace be with you, twice: the bequest of 14:27, my peace I give to you, delivered now in person by the risen testator, and given to men hiding behind locked doors with their failure, which tells you whom the peace is for. He shows them his hands and his side: the risen body keeps the wounds, glorified rather than erased; the Risen One is forever the Crucified One, identity intact, the whole gospel written in his skin (CCC 644-645). Then: as the Father has sent me, even so I send you, and he breathed on them, enephysēsen, and Genesis 2:7 stands up in the room: the LORD God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. Twice, in the whole of Scripture, God breathes on men: once to make Adam live, and once, in a locked room on Easter evening, to make this live: receive the Holy Spirit; if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. Whatever verse 23 institutes, it was worth the second breathing of God in the history of the world. Now let us hear the other reading at full strength.

Steelman: Declare Forgiveness, or Forgive?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

The Protestant reading of 20:23 is sincere, ancient in its instincts, and deserves its best form. Only God can forgive sins, the argument begins, and the scribes of Mark 2:7 were right about the principle even while wrong about the Person; there is one mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5), and inserting a human tribunal between the sinner and the Savior rebuilds the wall Christ died to remove. So verse 23, on this reading, is declarative, not judicial: the disciples, and through them all believers, are commissioned to announce the terms of forgiveness, whoever believes is forgiven, whoever refuses is not, proclaiming an amnesty God alone enacts. Notice, the argument adds, that the New Testament never once shows an apostle hearing a private confession or pronouncing an absolution; auricular confession as Catholics know it develops visibly across later centuries. The verse founds evangelism, not a confessional; the keys open the gospel to the

world, they do not lock a screen in a box. State it whole; millions of earnest Christians read it exactly so.

Question 4 (press from the text). Three probes, the first from the verse's own grammar. First: the sentence has two halves; the declarative reading explains forgive, but read the second half aloud: if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. Can a general announcement of amnesty retain anything, and what would retaining a particular person's particular sins require the minister to know, and how would he come to know it? Second: weigh the scene's machinery, the solemn sending, the second breathing of God in all Scripture, the conferral of the Spirit. Is that apparatus proportioned to authorizing what every believer could already do, tell people the gospel? Third: does the Catholic reading actually rival Mark 2:7 and 1 Timothy 2:5, or fulfill them, and what does the Church say the priest is doing in that box?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

First, the grammar is the Council of Trent's own argument, and it has never been answered: retention breaks the declarative reading. A herald announcing terms of amnesty forgives, in a loose sense, everyone who accepts; and when the reading's careful advocates apply retention to the unrepentant, notice the concession: retention has become a judgment about this person and these sins, and no minister can judge what he has not heard. The power to retain presupposes disclosure; confession is not a medieval addition to the verse, it is the verse's own working condition. The Lord built a ministry with two verbs, and the second verb requires a penitent's voice. Second, the proportion: locked doors, the wounds displayed, the apostolic sending in the very shape of the Son's own mission, and then the only divine breathing since Eden, conferring the Holy Spirit for this stated purpose. Heaven does not deploy the breath of Genesis to authorize what was never forbidden; every disciple could already share the good news, and no new creation was needed for it. The apparatus is institution-shaped because an institution is what it makes: a ministry of reconciliation lodged in the apostolic body (CCC 1461), the unbinding Augustine heard commanded at Lazarus' tomb, now chartered. Third, no rivalry: the Church confesses with Mark's scribes that God alone forgives sins, and reads verse 23's passives as Scripture reads such passives, they are forgiven, by God, whose minister speaks; the priest absolves in persona Christi, the one Mediator exercising his own mediation through the body he breathed on, exactly as in Baptism a man pours water and God regenerates. Ask the room, gently, which reading costs more and gives more: an announcement you could hear from anyone, or a moment when a particular voice, ordained in a line running back to a locked room, says to your named and spoken sins, I absolve you, and the verse's first verb happens to you in the present tense. The Church has been spending Easter evening's gift for twenty centuries; it is spent one penitent at a time, and it is waiting for everyone here, this week.

Question 5. Read 20:24-29. Give Thomas his due: recall his two earlier lines in this study. What does he demand, and what does Jesus, arriving eight days later, on a Sunday, offer him? Then the confession: read it aloud, and open the reserve our Session 2 press has held for twelve weeks: set 20:28 beside 1:1. What structure just completed? What does Jesus not do, and what does he do instead, and over whom is the final beatitude spoken? Look around the table as you answer that last one.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Thomas: let us also go, that we may die with him (11:16), and Lord, we do not know the way (14:5), loyal, gloomy, allergic to comfortable words, and now refusing secondhand joy: unless I see, I will never believe. Eight days later, the next Sunday, the Lord comes back for one man's doubt and offers the exact evidence demanded: put your finger here. We are not told Thomas touched; we are told what he said: my Lord and my God, ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou, and the reserve opens: the Gospel began, and the Word was God (1:1), and it ends with a man confessing my God to Jesus' face. The inclusio is complete; the frame the group discovered in Session 1 and defended in Session 2 closes on the far side of the resurrection, and Jesus does not correct the worship, he blesses it, which is itself the last quiet divinity datum of the book (CCC 448). St. Gregory the Great preached that Thomas' doubt has done more for our faith than the others' belief; in providence nothing, not even a bad week, is wasted. And then the beatitude, spoken over the heads of everyone in that room toward everyone not in it: blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. Leader, stop and look around the table: the sign-faith thread that opened at 2:23 resolves here, on this group, tonight. Fourteen weeks of believing without seeing; the beloved disciple modeled it at the tomb; the beatitude is theirs by name, and they should be allowed a moment to feel blessed.

Question 6. Read 20:30-31, the sentence the whole Gospel was written to say. Two payoffs to collect. First: whose confession, nearly word for word, from which tomb-side conversation in this study, is the purpose statement quoting? Second: what does verse 30 admit about signs, and what fourteen-week game of ours does it graciously acknowledge?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name. And the group heard that creed before the evangelist wrote it: Martha, at her brother's tomb, before the miracle, yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world (11:27). The grieving woman spoke the Gospel's thesis statement four chapters early, and Session 10's promise is kept: her exact words mattered enormously. A woman gave this Gospel its central confession, a woman first announced its resurrection, and its stated purpose is her creed, offered to every reader. And verse 30: many other signs, which are not written in this book: the author himself confirms what the tally taught us, the signs were selected, curated, arranged, and on the count the group has kept, seven fingers pointing, and the group's fourteen weeks of arguing over what counts was exactly the reading John designed for. He wrote so that we would believe; the tally was the syllabus.

Question 7. Read 21:1-14. Savor the staging: what do seven professionals catch in a full night without him, and which verse from Session 12 is being demonstrated commercially? At dawn, who recognizes the stranger first and who hits the water first, one last performance of whose pairing? Handle the 153 and the untorn net in one sentence each. And then the detail our board has waited two sessions for: what is burning on the beach, and where is the only other one in the entire New Testament?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Nothing: seven experienced fishermen, all night, nothing, and 15:5 hums underneath, apart from me you can do nothing, demonstrated at market rates. At his word, one cast, and a haul too heavy to lift: 153 large fish, mission and abundance, the Fathers seeing all the nations in the number, and the net was not torn, John's second image, beside the seamless tunic, of a unity that must not be

divided. The pairing performs its finale: it is the Lord, the beloved disciple sees first, and Peter, girding himself, throws himself into the sea, love recognizes, Peter acts, both runners still running. And on the beach: a charcoal fire, anthrakia, the second and last in the New Testament. The first one (18:18) lit a courtyard where Peter, warming himself, said I am not, three times. Jesus has rebuilt the scene: the same kind of firelight on Peter's face, bread and fish in the Lord's hands as once on a hillside, and breakfast set by the risen God before tired friends. He does not heal Peter's wound around the fire. He heals it at the fire. What that healing sounds like is the next reading, and it is the reason we told you in Session 13: remember this fire.

Question 8. Read 21:15-19, slowly; this is the payment of the study's oldest promissory note. Count the questions and set them against a number from the courtyard. Note, hedged, the famous variation in the love-verbs, and then land on what is certain: what does each confession receive, whose sheep are they, and which prophet's double promise from Session 9 is being handed on? What was Peter promised in 1:42, and what discharges tonight? Then the future: whose boast from 13:37 is finally underwritten, and what are the Gospel's last words of command to him, and to us?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Three questions for three denials, at a charcoal fire for a charcoal fire: Simon, son of John, do you love me? Nothing about the courtyard, no accounting demanded; as St. John Chrysostom preached, the only qualification examined is love, because love is the whole job description of what is being conferred. The verb variation, Jesus asking with agapas twice and receiving Peter's humbler philō, then asking the third time in Peter's own word, has been read as the Lord stooping to where Peter's honesty can reach, and also as simple synonym style; hold it lightly. What is certain is what each answer receives: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep, my sheep, the flock remains the Lord's, and its care is placed in Peter's hands: Ezekiel 34's shepherding, which only the God-man could fulfill, now delegated to the man he renamed. The Session 2 promissory note, you shall be called Cephas, rock, pays out tonight into an office: the risen Jesus entrusted his sheep to Peter (CCC 553, 881), and the Church sees that pastoral charge continuing in Peter's successors (CCC 881-882). Then the cost: when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, the death by which he would glorify God, and Peter's boast from the supper, I will lay down my life for you, borrowed unearned from the Good Shepherd, is finally underwritten: decades hence, in the martyr's death ancient tradition remembers as a cross, he will pay it, and this time the Lord accepts the pledge. And then the command, given twice, with comparison to the beloved disciple's different road forbidden in between (what is that to you?): follow me. The Gospel's story ends where discipleship begins, in two words addressed to a forgiven man beside a fire, and through him, to everyone who has ever read this book.

Question 9. Read 21:24-25, the last verses. Who signs the book, what do the elders around him countersign, and what does the final sentence confess about everything we have spent fourteen weeks on?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things: the man from the bosom (13:23), from the foot of the cross (19:35), from the tomb door (20:8), signs his testimony; and a we steps forward to countersign, and we know that his testimony is true, the voice

of a community vouching for its witness, by ancient tradition the church of Ephesus around its apostle, for the witness. And the last sentence bows out with a smile: were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Fourteen weeks, seven signs, seven I AMs, one Lamb, and the author's closing confession is that he showed us a thimbleful of the sea. Now bring the board forward; it has earned its ceremony.

THE BOARD, COMPLETE

CLOSING CEREMONY: walk the finished board

Stand at the board and walk it aloud, thread by thread, inviting group members to narrate the ones they remember best. The Hour: planted at a wedding, shield over the plot, turned by the Greeks, kept like an appointment, named as labor, finished at the sixth hour. The signs: seven, from water made wine to a dead man walking, counted by the group when the author put down his pen, and confessed at the end to be a selection from a sea. The I AMs: I am not from a Baptist, I AM to a Samaritan woman, on the waves, before Abraham, flattening a cohort in a garden; and seven predicates, bread, light, door, shepherd, resurrection, way and truth and life, vine. The dwelling: tent, ladder, temple of his body, and then, us. The water: a well, a cry at a feast, and an opened side. Light and darkness: a lamp-lit night visitor, a feast of candelabras, and it was night, and then, dawn on a beach. The Woman: Cana to Calvary. Nicodemus: night to daylight, a hundred pounds of myrrh. Peter: a rename, a boast, a bird, two fires, three questions, one office, follow me. Thomas: die with him, show me, my Lord and my God. And the Lamb: beheld, unexplained, counted in Passovers, eaten at Capernaum, slain at the hour of the lambs on hyssop with no bone broken, opened into blood and water, and announced at every elevation until the end of the world. Then the grace note: in the Revelation tradition joins to this same John, the throne vision shows a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain (Revelation 5:6). Standing: alive. As though slain: the wounds retained, like the hands and side he showed in the locked room. The Lamb you have beheld for fourteen weeks is not a past tense. He is standing. And this Sunday, when the priest raises him before Communion and says the Baptist's words over him, you will behold him, and then, because the Lamb of Exodus was never merely beheld, you will go up and receive him. Class dismissed; supper is served; follow me.

DIG DEEPER

For the road. John wrote a Gospel, three letters, and the Revelation, and the letters read like this study's alumni mail: the same beloved disciple, decades on, writing to churches full of people who had not seen and yet believed, about light and darkness, abiding, love one another, and the water and the blood. If this group wants a next chapter together, the Letters of St. John are the natural road, and the study That You May Know awaits: the aged apostle, making sure his little children know what they have.

Synthesis question. Last one of the study, and everyone answers: the Gospel's final command, given twice on the beach, is two words. Say them, and then say, concretely, what following looks like for you starting Monday.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Follow me. Let every person answer with something real: a sacrament returned to, a vocation examined, an Andrew-style invitation owed, a mother taken eis ta idia, a Sunday beheld with new eyes, a next study begun. Do not polish their answers; the Lord accepted Peter's philō, and he will accept these. Close by naming what the group has actually done: fourteen weeks ago they sealed a guess about a strange title, and tonight they walked out of an empty tomb knowing the Lamb by name, standing, wounds and all. The Gospel was written that you may believe, and that believing you may have life in his name. It worked on the beloved disciple's first readers. By the grace of God, it has been working here.

Send

1. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe: that beatitude was written about you, specifically, on purpose. Do you receive it, and what would living like a blessed person change this month?
2. Do you love me? He is asking you tonight, by name, with no accounting of your courtyards demanded. Answer him honestly, and then hear the commission that always follows the answer: who are the sheep being handed to you, in your family, your parish, your friendships, and what would feeding them look like?

Live It This Week

- **Receive Easter evening's gift.** Go to Confession this week. The sacrament was instituted with the second breathing of God in the history of the world, and it has been waiting, one penitent at a time, for twenty centuries. Kneel where the breath still works, name your sins to the wounded and risen Lord through his minister, and hear the verse happen to you in the present tense: they are forgiven.
- **Make breakfast.** The risen God's first recorded act of the new age, after forgiving and sending, was a breakfast laid for tired friends. Host a meal this week, for this group as its celebration, or for someone who needs one, and let the hospitality be your alleluia. Come and have breakfast is also a spirituality.
- **Keep following.** Choose your next step before Sunday, and tell one person what it is: re-read John alone, slowly, one chapter a week, now that you can hear it; or gather the group again for the Letters of St. John and That You May Know; and this Sunday, behold the Lamb, raised before Communion, with everything you now carry, and answer the supper invitation with the strongest Amen of your life.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud, and let the group stand: Lord Jesus Christ, Lamb of God, our Lord and our God: in the beginning you were the Word, and you became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have beheld your glory. You gave us wine at the wedding, water at the well, bread on the hillside, light at the feast, and your own flesh for the life of the world. You washed our feet, you loved us to the end, and it is finished. You called Mary by her name in the garden; call us by ours. You breathed on your apostles; breathe on your Church still. You asked Peter three times and gave him your sheep; ask us, and give us someone to feed. We have not seen, and we believe, and you have called us blessed. Now we hear your last command as our first: we will follow you. Behold the Lamb of God; behold him who takes away the sins of the

world; and blessed, blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK, AND KEEP IT: John 20:29

Jesus said to him, Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. (RSV2CE)

This is the Gospel's beatitude for its readers: for the beloved disciple's first audience, for every generation since, and, as of fourteen weeks ago, for this group by name. Carry it.

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 14, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 20:1-10** · still dark, the race, the cloths and the soudarion, he saw and believed
- **John 20:11-18** · whom do you seek (compare 1:38 and 18:4), the gardener, Mary (compare 10:3), do not hold me, go to my brethren
- **Psalms 30:5** · optional read-aloud, joy comes with the morning
- **John 20:19-23** · peace twice (compare 14:27), the wounds, the sending, the breath, forgive and retain
- **Genesis 2:7** · live discovery, the only other breathing of God; read aloud at 20:22
- **Mark 2:7 and 1 Timothy 2:5** · steelman texts, God alone forgives, one mediator; handled in the press
- **John 20:24-29** · Thomas, my Lord and my God (compare 1:1), the final beatitude
- **John 20:30-31** · the purpose statement (compare 11:27), many other signs not written
- **John 21:1-14** · the night of nothing (compare 15:5), the catch, 153 and the untorn net, the second charcoal fire (compare 18:18), breakfast
- **John 21:15-19** · the threefold restoration, feed my sheep (compare 1:42, Ezekiel 34), the death foretold (compare 13:37), follow me
- **John 21:20-25** · what is that to you, the witness signed and countersigned, the world could not contain
- **Revelation 5:6** · ceremony grace note, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain
- **CCC 448, 553, 644-645, 881, 976, 1461** · Catechism connections