

CATHOLIC ARMORY

Come and See

Bringing People to Christ, from First Friendship to Sending Out

An inductive Bible study in thirteen sessions,
with five standalone practicum modules

"Come and see." John 1:39

Using This Guide

This study takes an ordinary Catholic through the whole arc of bringing another person to Christ: earning trust, making room for an encounter, proposing him plainly, handing the person to the Church, and being sent. It does that by watching how it was actually done, in Scripture, and drawing the method out of the text rather than laying a method over it.

Thirteen core sessions run in order and are cumulative. Five modules are standalone and can be run at any point, in any order, or on their own with a group that has never done the core study.

WHAT IS IN EACH SESSION

Part One, the Leader Preparation Guide. Read this before the session, not during it. It carries the background, the Old Testament roots, three Voices of the Church, the Catechism references, a timed plan with pre-chosen cuts, and two leader-only sections described below.

Part Two, the Discussion Guide. What you actually work through with the group.

Part Three, the Leader Reference Card. Every passage used in the session, in order, so you can see the whole shape on one page.

THE MECHANICS, AND HOW TO USE THEM

Shaded ANSWER boxes sit under each numbered question and are marked "share after the discussion." That instruction is the point. Let the group work first and get it wrong; the box is what you say afterward, not what you read out instead.

Live discovery moments send the group to find something themselves. Do not tell them. The guide says so repeatedly because the temptation is constant, and a discovery handed over is worth about a tenth of one found.

Build then press panels give an objection at genuine full strength before answering it. Build it properly. If the room does not briefly feel its weight, the answer will not land, and your people will meet the real version of that objection from a real person who means it.

Thread Watch is leader-only. Three threads run across the thirteen sessions and resolve at fixed points. The guide will tell you when to hold something back, and holding it back is doing real work.

If It Goes Sideways is leader-only and new to this study. It is the mirror of the objection panel: what to do when the conversation turns, when someone discloses something, or when the room goes quiet in a way that matters.

The Field Report opens most sessions with five minutes on what happened during the week. Hold the line on no fixing and no advice. Reports where nothing happened are the most important ones in the room.

THE PRACTICE LADDER

Each of the first twelve sessions ends with one concrete practice, and they escalate deliberately: praying for three names in silence, then one unhurried conversation, then a shared meal, then a question that goes deeper, then finding what somebody already believes, then writing one true sentence, then saying it out loud, then doing

the errand you have been avoiding, then praying for someone who has already said no, then bringing someone into a room, then handing them to somebody who is not you, then telling someone who knew you before.

There are twelve rungs across thirteen sessions. Session 13 adds no new rung on purpose: it commissions, and sends people back to the one practice that has no end date. Participants who skip rungs will feel it. Leaders who skip the Field Report will find the ladder quietly stops happening by about week four.

THE SEALED PAGE

Take-Home 1 carries a page participants seal in the first week: three names, and one honest line about what they think actually stops them from speaking about Jesus. It is opened at Session 9, privately, and nobody is asked to read theirs aloud. The placement is deliberate, and Session 9 explains why.

PARTICIPANT MATERIALS

There is no participant journal. Participants receive a two-page Take-Home sheet **after** each session, carrying a recap of what the group found, that session's three Voices of the Church, the full practice, the memory verse, the reading for next time, and the Catechism references.

Take-Homes never contain answer content, objection or steelman material whether answered or unanswered, the passages a coming discovery will use, or Thread Watch material. Hand them out at the end, not the beginning.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

Scripture is quoted from the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition throughout. Catechism references have been checked to point at the paragraph that actually contains the claim, and where a session applies a paragraph beyond its wording, it says so.

The Voices of the Church follow a deliberate discipline. Where a saying is securely attested, it is quoted and cited as precisely as it is honestly known. Where the theology is genuinely a saint's but the exact wording or location is not certain, it is presented as a faithful summary rather than a quotation, and labeled that way in the attribution line, usually without a chapter number. Anything that could not be established either way was left out. Fewer, stronger citations are the aim.

Where the Church has not defined a matter, this study says so and represents the range rather than flattening it. There are several such places, and they are marked in the text.

IF YOU ARE RUNNING THE MODULES

The five modules are practicums. Roughly half of each is people writing, speaking, or deciding something, and the guides say plainly that the discussion is the setup rather than the substance. Two of them, on the people closest to you and on being hurt by the Church, carry mandatory safety notes to be given out loud at marked points. Read those modules in full before running them.

FRONT MATTER

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To Be With Him

Movement One: Trust and Friendship · Mark 3:13-19; John 1:35-51

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover, from Mark 3 and John 1, that the Lord's own method of spreading the Gospel was to call particular people into his company first and send them second, and that in John 1 not one named person arrives at Jesus alone.

Catholic Touchstone

The Church exists in order to evangelize, and every baptized person shares in Christ's prophetic office. What is handed on is not first a doctrine or a moral code but a Person. This study's pastoral emphasis follows from that: an introduction is a common and powerful form of evangelization, and it is not a rival to argument.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The two purposes, in that order

Mark 3:14 reads: "And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach." Two purposes hang off a single act of appointing. In the Greek they are two parallel purpose clauses, *hina* plus the subjunctive in each case: that they might be with him, and that he might send them out. This is one calling with two ends, not two separate jobs, and Mark names companionship first.

Nothing in the passage suggests the twelve were selected because they were qualified. Verse 13 says he called to him "those whom he desired." The initiative and the criterion are both his. St. Luke's parallel adds a detail Mark leaves out: Jesus spent the whole night in prayer before he chose (Luke 6:12-13).

The setting is a mountain, which in Mark is a place of revelation and appointment. The number is twelve, which is not a convenient committee size but the tribes of Israel. Jesus is not founding a club. He is refounding a people.

The list includes the man who handed him over

Mark closes the list at verse 19 with Judas Iscariot, "who betrayed him." This matters more than it looks. Mark refuses to let us read the calling as a guarantee. Being with Jesus is necessary and it is not sufficient, because nearness never overrides freedom.

Hold this. In Session 9, and again in the module on the people closest to you, someone in your group will be carrying a person who walked away. This verse is what keeps them from concluding that they must have done it wrong.

John 1: a chain made of ordinary introductions

St. John the Baptist points and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" Two of his own disciples leave him and follow Jesus. One is named as Andrew in verse 40. The other is never named. Many readers, ancient and modern, have

supposed the evangelist himself, and that reading is old and reasonable, but the text does not say so and we should not hand a plausible tradition to the group as a fact.

Jesus turns and speaks his first recorded words in this Gospel: "What do you seek?" It is a question, not an announcement. They answer with a question of their own, and it is a strange one. Not "what do you teach" but "where are you staying." The verb is *menō*, to remain or abide, one of the load-bearing verbs of this Gospel, and it runs all the way to "Abide in me" in John 15:4. Their question suggests they wanted his company, not only his information.

His answer is the title of this study: "Come and see." Then verse 39: "they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour." The evangelist remembers the time of day decades later, and reports not one word of what was said.

Then the chain. Andrew "first found his brother Simon" and brings him. Philip finds Nathanael and brings him. Philip himself is called directly by Jesus, and he is the exception the text puts right in the middle of the chain: verse 44 tells us his town belonged to Andrew and Peter, but a shared address is not an introduction. Every other named person here arrives through somebody. Hold Philip lightly, because Session 8 has God calling a man directly and still routing him through a human being.

What Philip did and did not do

Nathanael's objection in verse 46 is not a philosophical difficulty. It may be contempt for Nazareth, or scepticism that the Messiah could come from a place of no consequence; the village is unmentioned anywhere in the Old Testament. The text does not tell us which. Philip does three things worth noticing.

He made a specific, checkable claim first (verse 45): this is the one "of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote." He did not skip content. He then declined to defend Nazareth, which was not really the question. And he moved the conversation from a claim about a town to an encounter with a person.

What finally answers Nathanael is not an argument at all. Jesus tells him he saw him under the fig tree. The objection dissolves because Nathanael is known. Keep this in view: it is the hinge of the whole study, and it will be pressed hard in tonight's steelman.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The mountain and the appointed elders

Exodus 24:1-2 and 9-11: Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders go up the mountain, behold the God of Israel, and eat and drink. The pattern is called up, brought near, and given communion in God's presence. Note that the covenant is ratified earlier, in verses 3 to 8, before the ascent; do not reverse the sequence. What carries over to Mark's mountain is ascent, representative leadership, and nearness.

Elisha follows before he is sent

1 Kings 19:19-21: Elijah throws his mantle over Elisha at the plough. Elisha slaughters his oxen, burns the yokes, and then, in the text's own summary, follows Elijah and ministers to him. A long period of service follows. Only in 2 Kings 2:9-15 does he ask for the double portion and take up the mantle. The Old Testament already knows that a season of accompanying comes before a ministry of one's own.

Jacob, guile, and the ladder

This is tonight's live discovery, so do not spend it here. In Genesis 27:35 Isaac says of Jacob, "Your brother came with guile." In Genesis 28:10-17 that same man dreams of a ladder set on the earth with its top reaching heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it, and he wakes and says the Lord is in this place.

Jesus greets Nathanael as "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile," and then promises that they will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man. The "you" in verse 51 is plural: he begins with Nathanael and the promise widens to all of them. Jesus is placing himself where the ladder was. The first thing Nathanael is promised is not information. It is access.

The prophet like Moses

Deuteronomy 18:15-18 is one likely background among the law and the prophets Philip invokes in verse 45. The claim he makes to Nathanael is not vague enthusiasm; it is that the specific expectation running through the law and the prophets has landed on a particular man with an address.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Chrysostom on Andrew's first instinct

St. John Chrysostom, preaching his way through the Gospel of John for his congregation, teaches in substance that Andrew's very first act after his afternoon with Jesus was to go looking for his brother, and that this is simply what a heart does when it has actually received something.

That much is his. The application this study draws from it is our own, and worth keeping anyway: the impulse to share tends to follow from having received something, rather than being an extra duty laid on top of it.

St. John Chrysostom, summarized from his Homilies on the Gospel of John. This is a faithful summary of his teaching, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope St. Paul VI on witnesses and teachers

Pope St. Paul VI observed that people today listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and that if they do listen to teachers, it is because those teachers are also witnesses.

He was not dismissing teaching, and this study is not either. He was saying that the teaching gets a hearing through a life. That is the whole reason Movement One is about trust before Movement Two is about proclamation.

Pope St. Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi 41 (1975), restating a line from one of his own addresses the previous year.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Benedict XVI on what Christianity actually is

Pope Benedict XVI opened his first encyclical by insisting that being Christian is not the result of "an ethical choice or a lofty idea" but of an encounter with an event and a Person, an encounter that gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.

Everything in this study follows from that sentence. If what we were handing on were an idea, a good argument would be enough. It is a Person, so an introduction is required.

Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est 1 (2005).

CATECHISM CONNECTION

These paragraphs give the Church's own statement of the pattern the group is about to find in the text.

- **CCC 787.** From the beginning, Jesus associated his disciples with his own life, revealed the mystery of the Kingdom to them, and gave them a share in his mission, joy, and sufferings. This is Mark 3:14 in the Catechism's own words.
- **CCC 542.** Christ gathers people around himself by his word, by signs of the Kingdom, and by sending out his disciples. Gathering and sending belong to one movement.
- **CCC 425.** The transmission of the Christian faith consists primarily in proclaiming Jesus Christ in order to lead others to faith in him. Note the word primarily: not exclusively, but first.
- **CCC 429.** From the loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him. The Catechism puts desire downstream of knowledge, in that order.
- **CCC 904-907.** The baptized share in Christ's prophetic office, and the lay faithful in particular are called to this. This is not a specialist ministry.
- The application of these paragraphs to the three names your people will write tonight is our extension of them, not their wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Planted tonight in Mark 3:14. Every session from here asks quietly which of the two the room is neglecting. It resolves in Session 13. Do not name it as a thread out loud; just let the verse do its work.

Thread B, "Whose work is this?" Planted quietly tonight in "those whom he desired" and in Andrew announcing "we have found the Messiah" when in fact he had just been handed him. Someone may reach for this in Build 2. Affirm it in one sentence and move on. It gets pressed in Session 8 and resolved in Session 9. Resolving it tonight costs you the payoff.

Thread C, "The room you are afraid of." Planted tonight in Nathanael's prejudice about Nazareth, which is the first time in this study that a real social obstacle appears. It runs through Sessions 5, 8, and 12, and through the module on the people closest to you.

Sealed sheet. Take-Home 1 carries the sealed page. Tell the group tonight only that they will open it later in the study. Do not say which session. It opens at Session 9.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have every participant see, in the text of Mark 3:14 rather than on your authority, that the sending is the second of two purposes and not the first.
2. Have the group trace out of John 1 for themselves that every named person arrives at Jesus through another person.
3. Establish the thesis of the study: what we hand on is a Person, so the normal form of evangelization is an introduction rather than an argument.
4. Let the room say honestly what it braces for when faith comes up, without solving it tonight.
5. Get three names written, sealed, and prayed for daily starting this week.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:08	Welcome, opening prayer, and how this study works. Mention the weekly practice ladder and the sealed page.
0:08-0:22	Win questions. Let these run; the second one sets up the whole study.
0:22-0:40	Build 1 to 3, on Mark 3:13-19.
0:40-0:58	Build 4 to 6, on John 1:35-51.
0:58-1:08	Live discovery: Jacob, guile, and the ladder.
1:08-1:18	Build 7, the build-then-press on whether "come and see" is a dodge.
1:18-1:26	Send questions.
1:26-1:30	Live It This Week, hand out take-homes, explain the sealed page, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Run the Jacob discovery as a two minute leader summary instead of a group hunt. Saves eight minutes and costs the best moment of the night, so cut something else first if you can.
- Drop Build 3 (Judas on the list) and carry it into Session 9, where it fits equally well. Saves six minutes.
- Hold the Dig Deeper on the tenth hour for the take-home. Saves four minutes.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If someone says openly that they are not sure they believe any of this, do not correct it tonight. Thank them for saying it, tell them the study assumes a mixed room, and move on. Sessions 6 and 9 will meet them properly.

If someone treats the three names as a target list ("I am going to get my brother this year"), reframe gently and immediately: rung one is prayer and silence, and no one on that page is a project. Let the group hear you say it once, kindly, so it sets the tone for thirteen weeks.

If the room goes silent at the Win questions, answer the first one yourself, briefly, and include something that did not go well. The group will match the level of honesty you model, not the level you ask for.

If a strong apologist in the room hears tonight as "arguments do not matter," do not fight it in the moment. Point to Build 7, where the text answers it, and let the passage do the work.

Discussion Guide

To Be With Him

Mark 3:13-19; John 1:35-51

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you called the ones you wanted, and they came to you. Before you sent the Twelve out to preach, you kept them near. Keep us near this hour. Give us the honesty to admit what we are afraid of, and the trust to believe that you are already at work in the people we love. Amen.

WIN

- ▶ Who is the person who first made faith seem real to you? Not what they said. What did they actually do?
- ▶ When your faith comes up with someone who does not share it, what do you brace for?

BUILD

Read Mark 3:13-19 aloud, slowly, all the way through the list of names. Then work the questions. Resist the urge to summarize the passage before the group has looked at it.

- 1. Mark says Jesus appointed the twelve for two purposes. Read verse 14 again. What are the two, and in what order does Mark put them?**

ANSWER | share after the discussion

To be with him, and to be sent out to preach. Mark puts being with him first, and he hangs both purposes off a single act of appointing. In the Greek these are two parallel purpose clauses, so this is one calling with two ends rather than two separate jobs.

Nothing here suggests they were sent because they were qualified. They were sent because they had been kept close. If the group gets only one thing tonight, this is it.

- 2. Verse 13 says he called to him "those whom he desired." What does that phrase do to the idea that the twelve were picked for their usefulness?**

ANSWER | share after the discussion

It grounds the choice in his own initiative, and names no prior qualification as its basis. St. Luke's parallel adds that he spent the whole night in prayer before choosing (Luke 6:12-13).

There is relief in this and also a loss of control, and the group should feel both. If the selecting is his, then our part in another person's conversion is smaller than we fear and more real than we think.

Leader note: if someone reaches for "so conversion is God's work, not ours," affirm it in one sentence and

move on. That question is coming back later with much more force.

3. Read to the end of verse 19. Who is the last name on the list, and why would Mark put him there?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Judas Iscariot, named as the one who betrayed him. Mark will not let the calling be read as a guarantee.

Being near Jesus is necessary, and it is not sufficient, because nearness never overrides freedom. Judas had the external discipleship and the proximity. Persevering faith and interior communion are a further thing, and they are what this study is actually aiming at.

This is not a discouragement. It is protection. Later in this study someone will be accompanying a person who walks away, and this verse is what keeps them from concluding they did it wrong.

4. Now read John 1:35-51. On paper, make a simple list: who comes to Jesus in this passage, and how does each one get there?

Give them two minutes with pens before anyone speaks. The list is the point, and it lands harder if they build it themselves.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The two disciples of St. John the Baptist come because John points and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God." Simon comes because Andrew goes and gets him. Nathanael comes because Philip goes and gets him. Philip is called directly, and even he is found in a town that verse 44 tells us belonged to Andrew and Peter.

Every named person except Philip arrives through somebody else, and Philip is called directly by Jesus. The chain is made of ordinary introductions between people who already knew each other, with one exception the text puts right in the middle of it.

Ask them to sit in that for a moment before moving on. This is the pattern the rest of the study unpacks.

5. Jesus speaks his first recorded words in this Gospel in verse 38. What are they, and what kind of sentence is it?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"What do you seek?" It is a question. His opening move with two strangers is not an announcement, a proof, or an invitation to a program, and it leaves them room to answer badly.

Notice what they ask back. Not "what do you teach" but "where are you staying." The verb is *menō*, to remain or abide, and John will still be using it in "Abide in me" at John 15:4. Their question suggests they wanted his company, not only his information.

Then verse 39: they stayed with him that day, and it was about the tenth hour. Decades later the evangelist still remembers the time of day, and reports not one word of what was said.

DIG DEEPER

The tenth hour. Roughly four in the afternoon, if John is reckoning hours in the Jewish manner. The first evangelization in this Gospel is an unrecorded afternoon. What the evangelist chose to keep was the hour and not the conversation, which is worth sitting with, though the text does not tell us why.

The unnamed disciple. The text does not name him. Many readers, ancient and modern, have supposed the evangelist himself, and that reading is old and reasonable. John does not say so, and we should not hand the group a plausible tradition as though it were a fact.

6. Nathanael raises a real objection in verse 46. What does Philip say, and just as importantly, what does he not say?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He says, "Come and see." He does not defend Nazareth, and he does not produce an argument about the town.

But look at verse 45 before you conclude he dodged. He had just made a specific, checkable, historical claim: this is the one of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote. He kept the claim and changed the venue.

And notice what actually answers Nathanael. Not an argument at all. Jesus tells him he saw him under the fig tree, and the objection dissolves because Nathanael has been known. Hold that; the next question presses on it.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Do not tell them this one. Let them find it.

Ask two people to look up and read aloud, in this order: Genesis 27:35, then Genesis 28:10-17.

Then ask: what did Jesus just call Nathanael in verse 47, and what does he promise him in verse 51? Give the room a full minute of silence. Someone will get it.

What they should find: Jacob was the man who came with guile, and he is the man who saw a ladder set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Jesus greets Nathanael as an Israelite in whom there is no guile, and then promises him he will see heaven opened and the angels ascending and descending on the Son of man.

Jesus is putting himself where the ladder was. He is the place where heaven touches earth. The first thing Nathanael is promised is not information. It is access.

7. Someone says that "come and see" is a dodge, and that Philip should have answered the question he was actually asked. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below before you settle this. The honest conclusion is not "invitation instead of argument" but "invitation is the thing the argument is for."

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Put this at full strength. Do not let the room dismiss it, because a real person in a real conversation will make it.

Nathanael raised a specific objection and Philip simply did not engage it. In our own conversations, "come and see" can be exactly what we say when we cannot answer the question. A friend says the Church covered up abuse, or that the Resurrection is a legend that grew in the retelling, and "just come to Mass with me" is not an answer to either.

Scripture itself tells us to be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls us to account for our hope (1 Peter 3:15). Peter says make a defense. He does not say change the subject.

And the Catholic tradition has produced an enormous body of argument precisely because arguments matter. A Catholicism that can only ever say "come and see" produces people who cannot say why, and those people fold the first time someone with a confident objection sits down across from them.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First, look again at verse 45. Philip did not skip content. He made a specific, historical, checkable claim before he issued any invitation. Whatever "come and see" means here, it does not mean "say nothing true."

Second, look at what the objection actually was. Nathanael did not ask for evidence. He voiced a prejudice about a village. Philip answered the objection that was really there instead of the one that was formally stated, which is a skill this study will keep returning to.

Third, look at what resolved it. Jesus knew him. An argument can clear an obstacle out of the road; it does not by itself produce a disciple. Both are real work and they are not the same work.

So the answer to the objection is yes and no. Yes, we owe people real answers, and refusing to give them is cowardice dressed as humility. No, the answers are not the destination. They are how you get someone close enough to be known.

SEND

- Of the people you will actually see this week, who is the one you would least like to have this conversation with? You do not have to say the name out loud.
- If the ordinary way people meet Christ is that somebody they already trust introduces them, what does that make you?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 1 of the ladder. This week you do nothing visible at all. That is deliberate. Movement One is trust, and trust is not built by announcements.

- Write three names on the sealed page in your take-home. People you actually see, not people you admire from a distance.

- Pray for those three by name every day this week. One minute is enough. Say the names out loud.
- Tell no one that you are doing this. Especially not them.
- Notice, without acting, one moment this week when you could have said something about Christ and did not. Do not judge it. Just notice it, and bring it back next week.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you know the three names we have written better than we do, and you have been at work in them since long before we thought of them. Teach us to want them near you more than we want to be the one who brought them. Keep us with you this week, so that when you send us, we will have something to bring. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach."

Mark 3:14

SESSION 1 | PART THREE
Leader Reference Card

To Be With Him

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

Passage	Where and why
Mark 3:13-19	Primary text. The two purposes of the appointment, and the naming of Judas at the end of the list.
Luke 6:12-13	Leader prep and Build 2. The whole night in prayer before the choosing.
John 1:35-51	Primary text. The chain of introductions, "What do you seek," and "Come and see."
John 15:4	Build 5. The verb <i>menō</i> , abide, carried to its full weight later in the Gospel.
Exodus 24:1-2, 9-11	Old Testament Roots. Moses and the elders called up the mountain, brought near, and given communion in God's presence.
1 Kings 19:19-21	Old Testament Roots. Elisha follows and ministers to Elijah long before he is sent.
2 Kings 2:9-15	Old Testament Roots. The double portion, after the years of being with.
Genesis 27:35	Live discovery. Jacob, the man who came with guile.
Genesis 28:10-17	Live discovery. The ladder at Bethel, and the angels ascending and descending.
Deuteronomy 18:15-18	Old Testament Roots. The prophet like Moses, standing behind Philip's claim in verse 45.
1 Peter 3:15	Build 7, the objection at full strength. Always be prepared to make a defense.

Leader Preparation Guide

He Walked With Them

Movement One: Trust and Friendship · Luke 24:13-35

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover the actual shape of accompaniment by watching the risen Christ do it: he draws near, walks at their pace, asks a question he knows the answer to, absorbs a wrong account of himself without interrupting, corrects and teaches only after listening, waits to be invited in, and then disappears the moment they recognize him.

Catholic Touchstone

The Church's accompaniment of a person is ordered toward the Eucharist and toward mission, not toward attachment to the one accompanying. The Catechism reads the Eucharistic liturgy as unfolding according to the same movement found here: the Scriptures opened on the road, the bread broken at the table, and the disciples sent back out the same hour.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

A word on the two disciples

Luke names only Cleopas. The second disciple is never named. Some in the tradition have held that the second was Cleopas's wife, and the text neither says so nor rules it out. Say "two disciples" throughout, and if someone in the group assumes two men, correct it lightly and without making a project of it.

The detail matters practically. Luke gives us a pair walking home together, discussing, arguing, grieving. That is the ordinary unit in which most people process a loss of faith.

The sequence, which is the whole lesson

Track the verbs in order, because the order is the method. He draws near and goes with them (v15). Their eyes are kept from recognizing him (v16), which is passive: something is being permitted, not merely happening. He asks what they are discussing (v17). They stand still, looking sad. He listens to a long speech (vv19-24). He rebukes them (v25). He interprets all the Scriptures concerning himself (v27). He acts as if he would go further (v28). They press him to stay (v29). He takes, blesses, breaks, and gives (v30). Their eyes are opened, and he vanishes (v31).

Notice how much of the passage is Jesus receiving rather than delivering. The risen Lord of the universe, on the first day, walks seven miles and spends the first part of it listening to two people explain his own death to him incorrectly.

The speech they give him

Their account in verses 19-24 is almost entirely accurate. Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in deed and word; the chief priests delivered him up; he was crucified; it is the third day; some women found the tomb empty and saw a vision of angels. They have the facts.

The break is in verse 21: "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." The problem is not information. It is that their expectation of what redemption would look like has collapsed, and the facts are now arranged inside a wrong frame. This is often the position of the people your group is praying for: not missing every fact, but holding real facts inside a frame where those facts cannot land. Discern in each case whether a person lacks information, trust, context, or some combination.

What he does with the frame

He adds no new events to the ones they already have. What he does add, and at length, is the scriptural interpretation they plainly lacked, so that the cross moves from being the thing that ruined the story to being the thing the story was always about. "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (v26).

And notice that he does correct them, and not gently: "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" This passage is often used to argue that we should only ever listen. It does not support that. It supports a specific placement of correction: after long listening, inside a relationship they invited, aimed at Christ rather than at winning. It follows long listening; it does not follow an invitation, which comes later at verse 29.

He waits to be invited

Verse 28 is one of the most easily missed sentences in Luke: "He appeared to be going further." He is not playing a game. He will not force his way into the house any more than he forces his way into a soul. They have to say "Stay with us," and they do, and Luke tells us they constrained him.

This is tonight's live discovery, so hold it. There is an Old Testament pattern behind it that the group can find on their own.

Recognition, and then absence

He is known in the breaking of the bread, and in the same sentence he vanishes. Luke is being precise, not abrupt. Luke does not tell us why he vanishes. But the narrative moves them past the companion on the road to the table, and then to the mission: "they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem" (v33), seven miles back, in the dark, on the same day.

Keep this for Session 10 and for the whole of Movement Four. The person you accompany is not being handed to you. They are being handed to Christ and to his Church, and the sign that you did it well is that they can stand without you.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The suffering he opened to them

Luke does not tell us which texts Jesus used, which has not stopped anyone from guessing. The safest and richest candidates are Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the servant who is wounded for our transgressions; Psalm 22, whose opening line the crucified Christ prayed from the cross; and Deuteronomy 18:15-18, the prophet like Moses. Present these as the natural candidates, not as a reconstruction of what he actually said, because Luke deliberately does not tell us.

The Lord who appears to be passing by

This is tonight's live discovery. Genesis 18:1-5: the Lord appears to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, and Abraham runs to meet the three men and begs them not to pass by. Genesis 19:2-3 doubles it: the angels say they will spend the night in the street, and Lot presses them strongly until they turn in. The pattern of the divine visitor who waits to be pressed is older than Emmaus.

Bread and recognition

Luke 24:30 repeats the fourfold pattern of the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:16) and the Last Supper (Luke 22:19): took, blessed or gave thanks, broke, gave. The third verb differs between them, so speak of the pattern rather than of identical words. Luke's first readers would likely have recognised the resonance with their own Sunday assembly. The Old Testament root underneath is the manna of Exodus 16, bread given daily by a God who feeds a people on the way.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine on the hospitality that opened their eyes

Preaching in the Easter season, St. Augustine teaches in substance that these two did not recognize the Lord while he expounded the Scriptures to them, but recognized him when they received him as a guest. In welcoming a stranger, they welcomed the one they were mourning.

The pastoral edge he presses is that hospitality is not a preliminary to the encounter. It is where the encounter happened.

St. Augustine, summarized from his Easter season sermons on this passage. A faithful summary of his teaching, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Francis on the art of accompaniment

Pope Francis wrote that the Church has to initiate all her members, priests, religious, and laity, into this "art of accompaniment," and that the one who accompanies must learn to remove his sandals before the sacred ground of the other person.

In the same passage he says the pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring. What this study makes of that is our own application rather than his wording: accompaniment that is impatient, or that is really about the accompanier, has stopped being accompaniment.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium 169 (2013).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Gregory the Great on charity before understanding

Preaching on this Gospel, St. Gregory the Great teaches in substance that the two disciples did not yet believe, and yet they offered hospitality, and that it was in the doing of that charity that they came to know the one they had been talking about all afternoon.

His conclusion, put in his own pastoral register, is that we should not wait to understand before we love, because love is frequently the road by which understanding arrives.

St. Gregory the Great, summarized from his Forty Gospel Homilies. A faithful summary of his teaching, not a quotation.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Catechism reads this passage as the pattern of the Mass, which is exactly why this session sits inside a study on evangelization rather than off to one side of it.

- **CCC 1347.** The Catechism draws the parallel explicitly: the movement of the Eucharistic liturgy follows the movement of the risen Jesus with the disciples on the road, walking with them, explaining the Scriptures, then taking bread and breaking it.
- **CCC 1346.** The two great parts of the Mass, the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist, form one single act of worship.
- **CCC 108.** Christian faith is not a religion of the book. Christianity is the religion of the Word of God, a Word that is not written and mute but incarnate and living. The conclusion this session draws about the road and the table rests on Luke 24 with CCC 1346-1347, not on this paragraph.
- **CCC 601.** The divine plan of salvation through the death of the righteous servant was announced in advance in the Scriptures, which is what Jesus is doing in verse 27.
- **CCC 112.** Read the Scriptures within the unity of the whole of Scripture. Jesus models it here, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets."
- Applying CCC 1347 to your own weekly conversations with a friend is our extension of the paragraph, not its wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Developed tonight in the sharpest possible way: the moment they recognize him he is gone, and they walk seven miles back to Jerusalem in the dark. Being with him produced motion. Do not name the thread; let verse 33 land on its own.

Thread B, "Whose work is this?" Developed quietly in verse 16, "their eyes were kept from recognizing him," and in verse 31, "their eyes were opened." Both are passive. Someone may notice. If they do, agree and move on; the payoff is in Session 9.

Thread C, "The room you are afraid of." Not in play tonight. If it surfaces, park it.

Sealed sheet. Ask tonight, once, whether people have their three names written and are praying daily. Do not ask for the names. Do not let anyone reopen the sealed page.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group build the sequence of Jesus's actions out of the text in order, so that the method is something they observed rather than something you asserted.
2. Land verse 21 hard: the problem was a broken frame, not missing information, and that is what most of the people they are praying for are actually carrying.
3. Establish that correction is not forbidden, but that in this passage it comes after long listening and inside an invitation.
4. Have them find, on their own, the Old Testament pattern of the divine visitor who waits to be pressed.
5. Send everyone out with one unhurried conversation to have this week in which they ask and do not steer.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Field report on rung one. Five minutes, and hold the line on no fixing.
0:12-0:22	Win questions.
0:22-0:30	Read Luke 24:13-35 aloud in full, then Build 1 and 2.
0:30-0:48	Build 3 and 4, the speech they give him and what he does with it.
0:48-1:00	Build 5 and the live discovery on Genesis 18 and 19.
1:00-1:12	Build 6 and 7, recognition, absence, and the burning hearts.
1:12-1:22	Build 8, the build-then-press on listening and correction.
1:22-1:28	Send questions.
1:28-1:30	Live It This Week, take-homes, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Cut Build 7 (verse 32, the burning hearts) and put it on the take-home. Saves six minutes and is the least costly cut here.
- Run the Genesis discovery with one reader instead of two and skip Genesis 19. Saves five minutes.
- Shorten the field report to three minutes by asking for two volunteers rather than going around the room.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

Somebody in your group is one of these two disciples right now, holding real facts inside a broken frame after a death, an illness, or a betrayal. If that surfaces tonight, stop the study. Do what Jesus does in the passage: ask, and then be quiet for a long time. Do not hurry to verse 26. The session will keep.

If the group turns this into a technique ("so the method is listen, then correct"), push back once. The method in this passage is a Person who took a seven mile walk he did not need to take.

If someone uses verse 25 to justify being blunt with a family member, hold up the whole sequence. The rebuke lands in verse 25, which is to say after nine verses of listening and one direct question.

Discussion Guide

He Walked With Them

Luke 24:13-35

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, on the first day of your rising you took a long walk with two people who had it wrong. You asked before you told. You listened to a story about yourself that was almost right, and you did not interrupt. Give us that patience this week. And where our own frame is broken, open the Scriptures to us until our hearts burn. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Five minutes. Two or three people, briefly.

You spent last week praying for three people by name and saying nothing to anyone. What did you notice? Not what you accomplished. What you noticed.

Leader: do not solve anything here, do not offer advice, and do not let the group offer advice either. If someone says the week was flat and nothing happened, that is a real report and should be received as one.

WIN

- ▶ Think of a time when someone let you talk yourself out, without jumping in. What did that make possible?
- ▶ When you are grieving or angry about something, what does it feel like when someone hands you an explanation too quickly?

BUILD

Read Luke 24:13-35 aloud, all of it, without stopping to comment. Then have someone read verses 13 to 24 a second time. Tonight the group is going to track the order of what Jesus does, so the order needs to be fresh.

1. Look at verses 15 and 16. What are the first two things Jesus does, and what is he deliberately not doing?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He draws near, and he goes with them. That is all. He does not announce himself, does not correct the conversation he can obviously hear, and does not lead with the fact that he is alive.

Verse 16 says their eyes "were kept" from recognizing him. That is passive. It points to some agency beyond poor light, without telling us whose or in what mode. Whatever else this is, it is not an accident of poor

lighting; the concealment is doing work.

Ask the group to hold the question of why. It gets answered by the end of the passage.

2. Verse 17. What kind of sentence does he open with, and what does it produce in them?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

A question, and a wide open one: what are you discussing with each other as you walk? He asks something he does not need to ask.

What it produces is in the next line: "And they stood still, looking sad." The question stops them walking. A real question, asked by someone who is clearly willing to wait for the answer, will do that to a person.

Compare Session 1. His first words in John are also a question, and also about the interior: "What do you seek?"

3. Read their speech in verses 19 to 24 carefully. How much of it is factually wrong?

Push on this. The instinct in the room will be to say they had it all wrong, and they did not.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Almost none of it. Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people; the chief priests and rulers delivered him up; he was crucified; this is the third day; the women found the tomb empty and saw a vision of angels who said he was alive. Every fact is right, including the resurrection report.

The break is verse 21: "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." The problem is not that they lack information. It is that all this accurate information is sitting inside a frame that has just collapsed, so the facts have nowhere to go.

This is the single most useful sentence in the session. Many of the people your group is praying for are not chiefly missing facts about Jesus. They are holding facts inside a frame in which those facts cannot mean anything. Some do lack the basic story, and that is a different problem.

4. Verses 25 to 27. What does he do once they have finished, and what does he not do?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He corrects them, and not gently: "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" Then he gives them a long, demanding, content heavy teaching, interpreting in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

What he does not do is supply new events. He re-narrates the facts they already had, and he does add something genuinely new: the reading of the Scriptures that lets those facts mean something.

Notice where the correction sits in the sequence: after the question, after the long speech, after nine verses of listening. Not instead of listening, and not before it. And note that it comes before they invite him in at verse 29, so it follows sustained listening rather than an invitation.

5. Verse 28: "He appeared to be going further." Why would Luke bother to tell us that?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Because he will not invite himself in. They have to say it, and Luke tells us they had to press him: "they constrained him, saying, Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent."

The risen Christ, who has just walked seven miles for these two, arranges the evening so that the last move is theirs. Sit with how strange that is before you explain it.

There is an older pattern behind this. Find it before you move on.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Do not tell them. Send them looking.

Two readers. First Genesis 18:1-5, then Genesis 19:2-3. Read both aloud.

Then ask: what does Abraham beg the visitors not to do, and what do the angels first tell Lot they are going to do instead of coming inside?

What they should find: the Lord appears at Mamre and Abraham runs and begs him not to pass by. At Sodom the angels say they will spend the night in the street, and Lot has to press them strongly before they turn in. The divine visitor who waits to be pressed is an old pattern, and Luke 24:28 is standing inside it.

Then ask the question that matters: if the Lord himself waits to be invited, what does that say about how hard we should push a friend?

6. Verses 30 and 31. What finally opens their eyes, and what happens in the same breath?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened, they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight.

Luke repeats the fourfold pattern of the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:16) and the Last Supper (Luke 22:19): taking, blessing or giving thanks, breaking, giving. The third verb differs between them, so speak of the pattern rather than of identical words. His first readers would likely have recognised their own Sunday assembly in that line, and the Catechism reads the passage the same way (CCC 1347).

And he disappears immediately. He does not stay to be thanked or admired. Note what that means for anyone accompanying another person: the goal was never that they should end up attached to their companion on the road. It was the table, and then the sending.

7. Verse 32. What do they realize had already been happening, and when did they realize it?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" They realize it afterward. During the walk it registered as nothing more than an unusually good conversation with a stranger.

Tell your group plainly: much of what God does through them will be visible only in retrospect. Luke shows them naming it afterwards; he does not tell us what either of them thought during the walk.

Then verse 33: they rose that same hour and walked seven miles back, late in the day. This is what formation looks like from the outside. It produces motion.

8. Someone says this passage proves we should never correct anyone, that we should only ever listen and accompany. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. The passage does not teach the absence of correction. It teaches its placement.

DIG DEEPER

Which Scriptures did he use? Luke does not tell us, and every reconstruction is a guess. The natural candidates are Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12, Psalm 22, and Deuteronomy 18:15-18. Offer them as candidates, and be honest that Luke withheld the list.

Who was the second disciple? Luke names only Cleopas. Some in the tradition have held the second was Cleopas's wife. The text does not say, so we do not say.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it properly. This objection is held sincerely by good people, and half of it is true.

Jesus listens to a long, wrong speech about himself and does not interrupt once. He asks rather than announces. He conceals himself rather than overwhelming them with his authority. Everything about his conduct on that road is restraint.

And the Church herself has warned repeatedly against proselytism, insisting that she grows by attraction rather than by recruitment or pressure. Most people in our own lives are exhausted by being argued at, and they can tell the difference between a friend and a project within about ten seconds.

On top of that, the historical record gives the objection teeth. Plenty of people have been argued out of the Church by Catholics who were technically correct and pastorally brutal. Anyone who has watched that happen inside their own family will feel the full weight of this.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

Read verse 25 out loud again. "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" That is a rebuke, and it is sharper than anything most of us would dare say to a grieving friend. Whatever this passage teaches, it does not teach that correction is off the table.

Then read verse 27. What follows the rebuke is not a hug. It is a long, demanding, content heavy exposition of the whole Old Testament. He teaches them at length. The accompaniment was going somewhere.

So the question is not whether to correct but where correction sits. In this passage it sits after the question, after the listening, and inside a relationship they had begun to want. And it is aimed at Christ rather than at winning: he never says "you were wrong about me," he says "was it not necessary that the Christ should

suffer."

One clarification worth making out loud, because the word gets used loosely: when the Church rejects proselytism, she is rejecting coercion, manipulation, and inducement. She is not rejecting proclamation. Jesus proclaims for most of a seven mile walk in this passage. The Church has never taught that we should have nothing to say.

SEND

- ▶ Who in your life is holding accurate facts about Jesus inside a frame where those facts cannot mean anything? What is the frame?
- ▶ Where are you currently pushing when the passage would have you wait to be invited?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 2 of the ladder. One unhurried conversation. Still nothing announced, still nothing steered.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Have one conversation this week with one of the three that you do not steer. Ask one real question about their life and then stop talking. Aim to listen for longer than is comfortable.
- Do not bring up faith. If they bring it up, follow them, and still do not steer.
- Afterward, write down one sentence: what is the frame they are holding their life inside? Bring that sentence, not the person's name, back next week.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you drew near and went with them. You asked, and then you waited. Teach us to walk at somebody else's pace this week, and to want their eyes opened more than we want to be the one who opened them. And when you have opened the Scriptures to us, do not let us sit still. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Jesus himself drew near and went with them."

Luke 24:15

SESSION 2 | PART THREE

Leader Reference Card

He Walked With Them

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

Passage	Where and why
Luke 24:13-35	Primary text, read in full at the start and worked through in order.
Luke 9:16	Build 6. Took, blessed, broke, gave, at the feeding of the five thousand.
Luke 22:19	Build 6. The same four verbs at the Last Supper.
Genesis 18:1-5	Live discovery. Abraham begs the Lord not to pass by.
Genesis 19:2-3	Live discovery. The angels intend to stay in the street until Lot presses them.
Isaiah 52:13-53:12	Old Testament Roots and Dig Deeper. A natural candidate for verse 27.
Psalms 22	Old Testament Roots and Dig Deeper. Prayed by Christ from the cross.
Deuteronomy 18:15-18	Old Testament Roots. The prophet like Moses.
Exodus 16	Old Testament Roots. Manna, bread given daily to a people on the way.
John 1:38	Build 2. The parallel opening question from Session 1.

Leader Preparation Guide

Why Does He Eat With Sinners?

Movement One: Trust and Friendship · Mark 2:13-17; Luke 15:1-2; Luke 19:1-10

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover, from the order of events in Mark 2, that Jesus established table fellowship before Mark narrates any repentance, restitution or reform, that this was the specific thing that scandalized the religious, and that the proximity was itself part of the healing rather than an endorsement of anything.

Catholic Touchstone

The Church welcomes sinners into her fellowship and her worship without lowering the call to conversion, while admission to Communion remains governed by sacramental discipline. Mercy is not the suspension of the call; it is the way the call gets delivered. Both halves of that sentence have to survive tonight, or the session has failed.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The order of events, which is the argument

Track Mark 2:14-15 precisely. Jesus sees Levi at the tax office and says "Follow me." Levi rises and follows. Then there is a meal, and Mark tells us it is at table "in his house," with many tax collectors and sinners sitting with Jesus and his disciples, "for there were many who followed him."

Call, then table. Nothing in the passage makes repentance the price of admission to that table. Whatever repenting Levi did, Mark places the dinner before he reports any of it.

Then the complaint (v16), and only then the famous saying (v17). The saying is a response, not an opening statement. Jesus is explaining conduct that had already scandalized people.

Why "sinners" undersells it

Tax collectors in first century Galilee were not simply people with a morally awkward job. Levi, working at Capernaum, was most likely a customs agent under Herod Antipas rather than a contractor for Rome directly, and the details of the system varied by place. What is not in doubt is the contempt: it was social, religious and patriotic at once, and it attached to men who made their living from their own neighbours.

When your group reaches for a modern equivalent, let them, but steer away from cheap political point scoring. The useful question is: who is the person whose presence at your parish potluck would make people go quiet? That is the register Mark is working in.

The complaint, and who it is aimed at

Verse 16 is worth reading slowly: the scribes of the Pharisees see him eating with sinners and tax collectors, and they say to *his disciples*, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

They do not ask him. They ask the people around him. This is what usually happens to your group as well: the objection to Christ arrives at the friend, not at Christ, and the friend has to field it.

The physician saying does not deny the diagnosis

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (v17).

Notice what the image concedes. Jesus does not say the accusation is unfair or that these people are fine. He agrees they are sick. He simply points out that sick people are precisely who a physician exists for. The metaphor answers the charge of endorsement without softening the diagnosis by one degree.

Notice also the verb in the second half: he came to *call*. The table is not the end of the story. It is where the calling continues.

Luke turns the accusation into a title

Luke 15:1-2: the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him, and the Pharisees and scribes murmured, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

Luke then hangs three parables off that sentence: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. The single greatest chapter in the Gospels exists as an answer to a complaint. The accusation, taken as it stands, is an accurate summary of the Gospel, and Luke knows it.

Zacchaeus, if you have time

Luke 19:1-10 makes the sequence unmistakable. Jesus invites himself ("I must stay at your house today," and the Greek *dei* carries the sense of divine necessity). On the traditional reading the restitution comes later, at verse 8, unprompted, after the welcome. Note honestly that the Greek verbs there are present tense, and a minority of interpreters read Zacchaeus as defending an existing practice rather than announcing a new one.

Keep this in reserve as a Dig Deeper. The group will reach for it on their own once they see the pattern in Mark.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Mercy and not sacrifice

This is tonight's live discovery, so do not spend it in prep. St. Matthew's version of this same scene (Matthew 9:13) has Jesus send the objectors to Hosea 6:6 with the words "Go and learn what this means." He does not answer the objection himself. He assigns homework from the prophets.

The shepherd who goes looking

Ezekiel 34:10-16. God declares himself against the shepherds of Israel and says he will search for the sheep himself, seek the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the crippled, and strengthen the weak. Luke 15 and Luke 19:10 are both standing on this chapter, and Ezekiel 34:16 is a major Old Testament background to "the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."

The feast prepared for everyone

Isaiah 25:6-8: a feast of rich food on the mountain for all peoples, where death is swallowed up forever. Wisdom sets a table and sends her servants to call the simple in Proverbs 9:1-6. The image of God spreading a feast and calling in the unlikely is not a New Testament innovation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Chrysostom on who the Church is for

Preaching on St. Matthew's Gospel, St. John Chrysostom teaches in substance that Christ's answer to the objectors turns the whole charge around: a physician found among the sick is not thereby under accusation; the sick are the reason he came at all.

That much is his. The application this study draws is our own: a person who stays away because they feel unworthy has misunderstood what kind of house it is.

St. John Chrysostom, summarized from his Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew. A faithful summary of his teaching, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Francis on medicine and prizes

Pope Francis wrote that the Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak, and that the Church is not a tollhouse.

Read this alongside what the Church also teaches, because the paragraph is often quoted with the second half cut off. The Church's discipline that a person conscious of grave sin must receive sacramental absolution before communion is unchanged (CCC 1385; and see St. Paul at 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 for the biblical warning about unworthy reception, which is a distinct point). The application of this paragraph is genuinely debated among faithful Catholics. What is not debated is the pastoral posture: no one is refused welcome, pastoral care, or the call to conversion because their life is a mess, even though sacramental discipline remains in force.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium 47 (2013), read together with CCC 1385.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | The Second Vatican Council on a Church that holds sinners close

The Council taught that the Church, clasping sinners to her bosom, is at once holy and always in need of purification, and that she constantly follows the path of penance and renewal.

This is the sentence that keeps tonight honest in both directions. It does not say the Church tolerates sin. It says she holds sinners close, and that every one of her members has to reckon with his own need for purification.

Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium 8 (1964); see also CCC 827.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Catechism handles this scene directly, and its own wording holds both halves together better than most of us manage.

- **CCC 588.** Jesus scandalized the Pharisees by eating with tax collectors and sinners as familiarly as with themselves. The Catechism uses the word scandalized, and so should you.

- **CCC 545.** Jesus invites sinners to the table of the kingdom. Read the whole paragraph out loud if the group starts drifting: it says in the same breath that he invites them to the conversion without which one cannot enter the kingdom.
- **CCC 1443.** Jesus receiving sinners at his table is a sign both of God's forgiveness and of their reinstatement into the People of God. The meal is not incidental to the mercy; it is how the mercy is announced.
- **CCC 1385.** Anyone conscious of grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion; CCC 1457 provides for the narrow grave-reason case. Have this one ready tonight.
- **CCC 2447.** The spiritual works of mercy include instructing, advising, consoling, comforting, forgiving, and bearing wrongs patiently. This is the paragraph the steelman will lean on.
- The parish potluck illustration, and any modern equivalent your group reaches for, is our extension of these paragraphs rather than their wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Lightly developed: the table in Levi's house is "with him" in the most literal form the study will see. Do not comment.

Thread B, "Whose work is this?" Not in play tonight. Park it if it surfaces.

Thread C, "The room you are afraid of." Developed hard tonight, and this is its most important appearance before Session 8. The question of whose presence would make the room go quiet is the thread in the open. Let it stay uncomfortable and do not resolve it.

Watch for. Someone in your group has a family member living in a situation the Church calls gravely wrong, and tonight is either a great relief or a fresh wound. Notice who goes quiet. Follow up privately during the week, not in the room.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group establish the order of events in Mark 2 from the text: call, table, complaint, saying. The order is the argument.
2. Make clear that the physician saying concedes the diagnosis rather than denying it, so nobody leaves thinking Jesus was indifferent to sin.
3. Have the group find Hosea 6:6 behind Matthew 9:13 themselves, and notice that Jesus answers an objection by assigning reading.
4. Work the "friendship without correction is complicity" objection at full strength and land the honest answer: correction is ordinarily heard far better inside a relationship of trust, and that is a claim about receptivity rather than a rule.
5. Move the practice ladder from listening to hospitality: a shared meal this week with no agenda at all.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Field report on rung two, the unhurried conversation.
0:12-0:20	Win questions.
0:20-0:34	Read Mark 2:13-17 aloud. Build 1 and 2.
0:34-0:46	Build 3 and 4, the complaint and the physician saying.
0:46-0:56	Build 5, Luke 15:1-2 and what Luke does with the accusation.
0:56-1:06	Live discovery: Hosea 6:6 behind Matthew 9:13.
1:06-1:20	Build 6, the build-then-press on friendship and complicity. Give this its full time.
1:20-1:26	Send questions.
1:26-1:30	Live It This Week, take-homes, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Drop Build 5 (Luke 15:1-2); the take-home recap already carries it. Saves ten minutes. It is the cheapest cut tonight because Mark carries the same point.
- Run the Hosea discovery as a single reading with no hunt. Saves six minutes.
- Skip the Zacchaeus Dig Deeper entirely. It returns in a later module.
- Do not cut the build-then-press. If you are short, cut two Build questions and keep it whole.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If the room turns this into "so the Church should stop teaching X," stop and read CCC 545 out loud, whole. The paragraph does the work for you, and it is better coming from the Catechism than from you.

If the room turns the other way and starts listing who really needs to repent, ask one question and then be quiet: which of the people at Levi's table would you have wanted removed?

If someone discloses something serious about their own life in this session, receive it and move the group on quickly to protect them. Follow up in private within the week, and know where your parish's confession times are before you walk in tonight.

If someone asks a direct question about who may receive communion, answer it plainly with CCC 1385 rather than improvising. Then say you are happy to talk it through afterward, and move on. Do not let the session become a debate about sacramental discipline; it is not tonight's subject and it will eat the hour.

Discussion Guide

Why Does He Eat With Sinners?

Mark 2:13-17; Luke 15:1-2; Luke 19:1-10

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you called a tax collector off his bench and then sat down to dinner in his house with all his friends, and it cost you your reputation. Give us the nerve for that kind of friendship, and keep us from the two easy escapes: pretending nothing is wrong, and standing outside the door being right. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Five minutes. Two or three people.

Last week you had one conversation you did not steer. What did you learn about the frame the other person is living inside?

Leader: no names, no advice, no problem solving. If someone says the conversation never happened, that is a normal report in week three. Receive it without comment.

WIN

- ▶ Think of a table you were welcomed at when you did not really belong there. What did it do to you?
- ▶ Who is someone you enjoy, whose life you would not defend? How do you hold both of those at once?

BUILD

Read Mark 2:13-17 aloud. It is short, so read it twice. Tonight the group is going to work the order of events, so the sequence needs to be clear in everyone's head before the first question.

1. Put the events of verses 14 and 15 in order. What happens first, and what has not yet happened when the meal begins?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Jesus sees Levi at the tax office and says "Follow me." Levi rises and follows. Then there is a dinner at table in his house, with many tax collectors and sinners.

Call, then table. Mark reports no repentance, no restitution, and no change of profession before the meal. Whatever Levi later became, the dinner is not waiting on it.

The order is the argument of the whole session. Repentance was not the price of admission to that table. The

table is where the calling continued.

2. Who were tax collectors, actually? Why is "sinners" too mild a word for what the room felt about them?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They made their living from their own neighbours inside a system of foreign domination, and they were held in religious suspicion as well. Levi at Capernaum was most likely a customs agent under Herod Antipas rather than a Roman contractor; the arrangements varied. The contempt was patriotic, financial and religious at once.

Let the group find a modern equivalent, but do not let it become a political scoring exercise. The sharper question: who is the person whose arrival at your parish potluck would make the room go quiet? That is the register.

3. Read verse 16 slowly. What is the exact complaint, and who do they bring it to?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The complaint is not about his teaching, his claims, or his miracles. It is "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" The objection is to the meal.

And they do not ask him. They ask his disciples. Point that out and let it sit, because it is the situation your group is actually in: the objection to Christ usually arrives at the friend rather than at Christ, and the friend has to field it without notice.

4. Verse 17 is a proverb followed by a mission statement. What does the physician image concede, and what does it refuse?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

It concedes the diagnosis completely. Jesus does not say these people are fine, or that the criticism is unfair, or that the categories of sick and well are unhelpful. He agrees that they are sick.

What it refuses is the inference. Sick people are exactly who a physician exists for, so a physician found among the sick is not thereby under suspicion.

This is the answer to the fear that friendship equals approval, and it is worth saying out loud in those words. Nearness is not endorsement. A physician who avoided sick people would not be principled. He would be useless.

Then notice the verb: he came to *call*. The table is not the destination.

5. Turn to Luke 15:1-2. What is the complaint there, and what does Luke do with that sentence?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"This man receives sinners and eats with them." It is the same objection, sharpened into a single line.

And Luke hangs the entire rest of the chapter on it: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. The

greatest chapter in the Gospels exists as an answer to a complaint about who Jesus ate with.

Read the accusation again as though it were a creed. It is entirely accurate. His opponents summarized the Gospel better than they knew.

6. St. Matthew tells this same story and adds one line that Mark leaves out. Find Matthew 9:13. What does Jesus do there instead of answering?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He tells them to go and learn something. He answers a hostile objection by assigning reading from the prophets, and then repeats his mission statement.

The discovery below sends the group to the passage he assigned. Do not do it for them.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Send them to find it.

Jesus says "Go and learn what this means, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice." Have someone locate the source: Hosea 6:6. Read the whole verse aloud.

Then have a second person read Hosea 6:4-6 for context, and ask: who is God speaking to in Hosea, and what were they doing wrong?

What they should find: God is speaking to his own religious people, whose love is like a morning cloud, and who are keeping the sacrificial system running while missing the point of it. Jesus does not send his critics to a text about scandalous sinners. He sends them to an oracle that rebukes God's own covenant people for a love that evaporates.

A textual note worth giving them, honestly. In most English Old Testaments Hosea 6:6 reads "steadfast love," translating the Hebrew *hesed*, while Matthew's Greek reads "mercy," following the Septuagint's *eleos*. This is not an error in Matthew. It is the standard Greek rendering of a Hebrew word that English cannot carry in one syllable. If someone in your group is being told that the New Testament misquotes the Old, this is a clean, checkable example of what is actually going on.

7. Someone says: friendship without correction is complicity. If I never tell my friend that what he is doing is gravely wrong, my silence tells him it is fine. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. Do not resolve it quickly in either direction; both halves of the answer have to survive.

DIG DEEPER

Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1-10. Jesus invites himself: "I must stay at your house today." The Greek *dei* carries the sense of divine necessity, the same word used of the cross. Then the muttering, then verse 8, then "Today salvation has come to this house." Notice that Zacchaeus is never asked for anything. One honest note: the

verbs in verse 8 are present tense, so while the traditional reading takes it as a new act of restitution, some interpreters read him as defending what he already does. Give the group both.

Ezekiel 34:10-16. God fires the shepherds of Israel and says he will do the searching himself. Luke 19:10, "the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost," stands on that chapter.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build this at full strength. Half of it is true, and the people who hold it are usually holding it because they have watched someone they love walk off a cliff in silence.

Ezekiel 3:18 is not a soft text: if you do not warn the wicked man, he shall die in his iniquity, and his blood God will require at your hand. That is Scripture, and it is addressed to the one who stayed quiet.

Admonishing the sinner is a spiritual work of mercy (CCC 2447). Silence is not neutral. It communicates, and what it usually communicates is that the thing did not matter enough to risk the friendship over.

There is real pastoral damage on this side too. A Catholicism that never says anything produces friends who genuinely believe the Church has no position, and then feel ambushed and betrayed when they discover she does, and that you knew.

And be honest about the self serving version. "I am building trust first" can be a permanent address. Some of us have been on rung one for fifteen years and have called our cowardice patience.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First: the standard never moved. The same Gospel that puts Jesus at Levi's table has him teaching on marriage in Mark 10 and on the interior of the heart in Mark 7. He did not buy the dinner with a discount on the truth, and he is not available as a precedent for anyone who wants to.

Second: look at the order again. Call, table, complaint, saying. Repentance is not the entry fee. In Luke 19 the sequence is even starker: Jesus invites himself into Zacchaeus's house, and the restitution arrives afterward, unprompted, at verse 8. The table was not the reward for the change. It was the setting of it.

Third: the physician saying already answers the complicity charge. Jesus concedes the diagnosis. Nearness is not endorsement, and the group should be able to say that sentence back to you.

On the Ezekiel text: read verses 17 to 21, not verse 18 alone. The bloodguilt falls on a man appointed watchman over Israel, and the same passage says that a watchman who warns and is not heeded has saved his own life. The obligation is to sound the warning. The outcome was never his, and it is not yours.

Fourth, and this is the sentence to send them home with: correction is ordinarily heard far better inside a relationship of trust than outside one. That is a claim about receptivity, not a rule: parents, pastors, teachers and prophets legitimately correct people who are not their friends.

So the objector is right that silence is not neutral, and wrong about the timing. Movement One is not a permanent address; it is the first three weeks of thirteen. If a person in your group is using friendship as a reason never to speak, this study is going to come for them in Session 7.

SEND

- ▶ Whose presence at your table would cost you something socially? What would it cost, and with whom?
- ▶ Is there someone in your life for whom you have used "I am building trust" as a way of never getting to anything else? You do not have to answer out loud.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 3 of the ladder. From listening to hospitality. This week you share a meal, and you pay.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Eat with one of the three this week. A real meal or a real coffee, sitting down, an hour if you can get it.
- Go with no agenda at all. No steering, no opening, no plan for how faith might come up. If it comes up, follow it and stay honest.
- Pay. Do not make anything of it.
- Afterward, ask yourself one question: was I with them, or was I working on them? Bring the answer, not the person, back next week.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, they said of you that you receive sinners and eat with them, and they meant it as an accusation. Make it true of us. Give us tables where people who are nowhere near you can sit down and be at ease, and give us the courage, when the time comes, to say the true thing kindly. Keep us from cowardice dressed as patience, and from correction dressed as love. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Mark 2:17

Leader Reference Card

Why Does He Eat With Sinners?

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

Passage	Where and why
Mark 2:13-17	Primary text. Call, table, complaint, and the physician saying, in that order.
Luke 15:1-2	Build 5. The accusation that generates the three parables of the lost.
Matthew 9:13	Build 6 and live discovery. "Go and learn what this means."
Hosea 6:6	Live discovery. Mercy and not sacrifice, addressed to religious people.
Hosea 6:4-6	Live discovery, context. Love like a morning cloud.
Luke 19:1-10	Dig Deeper and the press. Zacchaeus, and restitution arriving afterward.
Ezekiel 34:10-16	Old Testament Roots and Dig Deeper. God takes the searching into his own hands.
Ezekiel 3:18	The objection at full strength. The watchman who fails to warn.
Isaiah 25:6-8	Old Testament Roots. The feast on the mountain for all peoples.
Proverbs 9:1-6	Old Testament Roots. Wisdom sets a table and sends out servants.
Mark 7:14-23; Mark 10:1-12	The press. The same Gospel, with the moral standard undiminished.
1 Corinthians 11:27-29	Voices of the Church. Worthy reception, read alongside CCC 1385.

Leader Preparation Guide

Give Me a Drink

Movement Two: Creating Space for an Encounter · John 4:1-42

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover how a real conversation ascends, by tracking who asks what and in what order: Jesus opens by needing something from her, lets her deflect twice without chasing the deflection, names the sore place only after she has asked him for something, answers her theological dodge seriously instead of dismissing it, and gives her the first plain statement in this Gospel that he is the Messiah.

Catholic Touchstone

The Church proposes Christ inside real conversation, and grace works through the natural. The Catechism locates the whole mystery of prayer at this well: Christ comes to meet every human being and is the first to ask for a drink, and his thirst arises from the depths of God's desire for us.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Where the conversation starts

Verse 4 says he "had to pass through Samaria." The Greek is *edei*, the same family as the necessity you met at Zacchaeus's house in Session 3. Be careful how you use it: the verb can express ordinary necessity, and the road through Samaria was in fact the direct route from Judea to Galilee. John may well intend divine purpose here, and the geography does not by itself prove it.

He arrives wearied from the journey and sits down by the well at about the sixth hour. On the standard reading of St. John's time references that is noon, which is how nearly all commentators take it; a minority argue he uses Roman civil reckoning, which would make it early evening. Noon is the reading this session assumes. She comes at noon too, alone. It is often said that women drew water in the cool of the morning and in company, and that noon suggests isolation. Treat that as a common inference rather than an established custom: the text gives neither her motive nor any comparison.

Then the opening line: "Give me a drink." He does not open with a claim, a diagnosis, or an invitation. He opens by needing something from her, which puts her in the position of benefactor to a stranger who has nothing to draw with.

The barriers, which the text names for us

Verse 9 has her list them herself: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" Then the narrator adds the aside, "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans."

Stack them: ethnic and religious hostility going back centuries, a man speaking to a woman alone in public (verse 27 tells us the disciples marveled at exactly this), and a rabbi speaking at length with a woman alone. Jesus crosses all three in six words, and he does it by asking for a favor.

The ladder, and the two deflections

She turns aside twice, and both times he raises the stakes rather than chasing her. Note that the text does not tell us her motive, so offer "deflection" as one pastoral reading rather than a finding. At verse 9 she turns to ethnicity, and he answers with the gift of God and living water. At verse 11 she deflects into the practical ("you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep"), and he answers with water welling up to eternal life.

"Living water" ordinarily meant moving water, spring water rather than cistern water. She hears it that way, which is the point. St. John does this constantly: Nicodemus hears "born again" literally one chapter earlier. The misunderstanding is not stupidity. It is what happens when someone is being addressed at a level they have not yet arrived at, and Jesus does not correct the misunderstanding so much as keep climbing until she follows.

At verse 15 she asks: "Sir, give me this water." She has asked. Note that carefully, because the next verse is the one everyone quotes out of order.

What he says about her life, and what he does not say

"Go, call your husband." Then, when she answers honestly, he states the fact: five husbands, and the man she has now is not her husband. That is all. No adjective, no verdict, no exhortation, no call to repent of it. He names it once and never returns to it for the rest of the chapter.

Be honest with your group about what the text does not tell us. It does not tell us her moral history. In that world a woman could not ordinarily initiate a divorce herself; five husbands could be consistent with widowhood, with being discarded repeatedly by men, with levirate arrangements, or with a chaotic life. Preachers fill this in constantly. The evangelist did not. Saying that out loud in front of your group is itself a lesson in how much we assume about the people we are praying for.

What is not in doubt is that she recognized it as exposure: "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet."

The theological dodge, and why he takes it seriously

Verse 20 is one of the most human moves in the Gospels. Right after she names him a prophet, she turns to a live controversy. Whether this is evasion, or a real question put to a prophet, or both, the text does not say: our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you say Jerusalem. This is exactly what your friends will do when a conversation gets close, and it will usually arrive as a question about the Crusades, or contraception, or why God allows suffering.

Watch what Jesus does not do. He does not dismiss it as a dodge, and he does not drag her back to the husbands. He answers the question substantively, and his answer is not a soft one: "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (v22). That is a hard, non-relativist sentence, and it sits in the middle of the most tender conversation in the Gospel.

Then he moves past the question to what it was really about: the hour is coming when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, and the Father is seeking such people. He answered the question and refused to let it be a hiding place.

The self-disclosure, and what she does with it

Verse 26: "I who speak to you am he." In this Gospel that is the first time Jesus plainly tells anyone that he is the Messiah. Andrew had already used the title back in 1:41, but this is Jesus saying it himself, and he says it to a Samaritan woman alone at a well, not to the crowd, the authorities, or the Twelve.

Verse 28: she left her water jar. She came for water and went home without it.

Verse 29 is the form of her evangelizing, and it is worth reading twice: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" An invitation and a question. Not an announcement, not an argument, and not a claim she was not yet in a position to make.

Then verses 39 to 42. Many believed because of her word. Then they came, heard him themselves, and told her: it is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves. That sentence sounds dismissive and is in fact the highest compliment the chapter pays her. Her witness brought them to a direct encounter with Christ, which is what witness is for. Hold this; it comes back in Movement Four.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The well, and what happens at wells

This is tonight's live discovery, so do not spend it in prep. The relevant passages are Genesis 24:10-27, Genesis 29:1-12, and Exodus 2:15-21. Read them yourself before the session so you can steer without telling.

The fountain of living waters

Jeremiah 2:13 is the sharpest root: "they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water." See also Jeremiah 17:13, Isaiah 55:1, Ezekiel 47:1-12, and Zechariah 14:8. Living water is not a metaphor Jesus invented on the spot. Jeremiah 2:13 is a likely and illuminating background, though the image carries several biblical associations at once: cleansing, divine life, the water from the temple, and the Spirit.

Where the Samaritan quarrel came from

2 Kings 17:24-41 gives important biblical background to the later hostility, describing the resettlement of Samaria after the Assyrian deportations and the mixed worship that followed, and the Samaritans maintained a temple on Mount Gerizim, destroyed by the Hasmoneans in the second century before Christ. When she says "our fathers worshiped on this mountain," she is standing within sight of the ruins of a real argument, not raising a hypothetical.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine on who was really thirsty

St. Augustine, preaching through the Gospel of John, teaches in substance that the one who asked for a drink was thirsting for her faith. He asked for water and he was seeking the woman.

The Catechism makes the same move at CCC 2560, where it says that Christ is the first to ask for a drink and that his thirst arises from the depths of God's desire for us. If you take only one image away from this session, take that one: the conversation opened because he wanted something, and what he wanted was her.

St. Augustine, summarized from his Tractates on the Gospel of John. A faithful summary of his teaching, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Francis on where the word comes in

Pope Francis described person to person evangelization as beginning with personal dialogue, in which the other person speaks first and shares their joys, hopes, and worries about the people they love, and said that only afterward is it possible to bring up God's word.

That is the order in John 4, put in modern words. He also insists in the same passage that the word does

eventually get brought up, which is why this study has a Movement Three.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium 128 (2013).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | The Eastern tradition on the woman at the well

The Eastern churches have long honored this woman as an evangelist and martyr under the name Photini, "the enlightened one," with a body of tradition holding that she preached and died for the faith. The Syriac tradition, associated with St. Ephrem, dwells on her as the one who carried the news back into the city.

Take it exactly as it stands: a venerable tradition rather than something St. John reports. The Gospel tells us that many believed in Jesus because of her testimony, and that the town then came to him themselves. The tradition tells us the Church never forgot her.

Eastern liturgical tradition, honoring her as St. Photini. Tradition, not Scripture, and offered as such.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Catechism reaches this well at the opening of its treatment of prayer, which tells you how central the Church takes this scene to be. Part Four begins at CCC 2558; the well appears at 2560.

- **CCC 2560.** Beside the well where we come seeking water, Christ comes to meet every human being, and he is the first to ask for a drink. Prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours.
- **CCC 2561.** Our prayer is a response to the living God who thirsts for us; the request comes second.
- **CCC 728.** Jesus alludes to the Holy Spirit in speaking with the Samaritan woman, before the Spirit is fully revealed.
- **CCC 694.** Water is a symbol of the Spirit's action in Baptism.
- **CCC 839.** The relationship of the Church with the Jewish people, which is the ground beneath "salvation is from the Jews" in verse 22.
- The application of CCC 2560 to your own conversations this week is our extension of the paragraph, not its wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Developed tonight in the strongest form yet: she leaves the jar and goes to the city, and the town comes out. Do not comment on it.

Thread B, "Whose work is this?" This is its biggest development before Session 8. Two places: verse 23, where the Father is the one seeking worshipers, and verse 42, where the town tells her their faith no longer rests on her word. Someone may put it together tonight. If they do, agree in one sentence and move on. Do not resolve it. Session 9 is where it pays.

Thread C, "The room you are afraid of." Samaria itself, and verse 27, where the disciples marvel that he was talking with a woman. Note that none of them said anything.

Watch for. Verses 16 to 18 will land hard on anyone in the room who is divorced, remarried outside the

Church, or living in an irregular situation. Handle the honest note about what the text does not say, and give it fully. It is protective.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group build the order of the conversation out of the text: he asks first, she deflects twice, she asks at verse 15, and only then does he name her life at verse 16.
2. Establish that he named the sore place once, without a verdict, and never returned to it.
3. Have the group see that he answered her theological dodge seriously rather than dismissing it, and that his answer at verse 22 was not a soft one.
4. Have them find the Old Testament well pattern themselves, and see what St. John is doing with it.
5. Land verse 42: being walked past is what a bridge is for.
6. Move the ladder from hospitality to a question that goes one layer deeper than usual.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Field report on rung three, the shared meal.
0:12-0:20	Win questions.
0:20-0:26	Read John 4:1-30 aloud. It is long; assign parts and read it as dialogue.
0:26-0:40	Build 1 to 3, the opening, the barriers, and the ladder.
0:40-0:52	Build 4 and 5, what he says about her life and what she does with the theology question.
0:52-0:58	Build 6, the self-disclosure.
0:58-1:10	Live discovery: what happens at wells.
1:10-1:18	Build 7, her evangelizing and verse 42. Read verses 39 to 42 aloud here.
1:18-1:26	Build 8, the build-then-press on naming sin.
1:26-1:30	Send questions, Live It This Week, take-homes, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Read only verses 1 to 26 aloud at the start and summarize 27 to 30 yourself. Saves five minutes.
- Run the well discovery with Genesis 24 and Exodus 2 only, dropping Genesis 29. Saves five minutes and keeps the pattern intact.
- Drop Build 6 (the self-disclosure) into the take-home; verse 26 will have already come up in the reading. Saves six minutes.
- Do not cut Build 8. If the session is running long, cut Build 3 instead.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If the room starts speculating about the woman's sexual history, stop it at once and give them the honest note: a woman could not ordinarily initiate a divorce herself in that world, and the text does not tell us. Then ask what it means that we filled in a gap the evangelist left open, and whether we do that to the people on our own lists.

If someone is thrown by "salvation is from the Jews," do not soften it. Read CCC 839 and let it stand. It is one of the clearest anti-relativist sentences in the Gospels and it is spoken to a Samaritan in a conversation of enormous tenderness. Both things are true.

If a person in the room is in an irregular marriage situation and goes quiet, do not pursue it in the room. Follow up privately in the week, and know your parish's process before you walk in.

If the group concludes "so we should never bring up sin," point to verse 16. He did bring it up. Then point to verse 15 and ask what had just happened.

Discussion Guide

Give Me a Drink

John 4:1-42

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you sat down tired at a well in the middle of the day and asked a stranger for a drink, and by the end of the conversation she had left her jar behind. Give us that patience and that nerve. Teach us to ask before we tell, to hear the question under the question, and to want the people we love to know you more than we want to be the one who explained you. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Five minutes. Two or three people.

Last week you ate with someone and paid, with no agenda. The question you took away was: was I with them, or working on them? What was the honest answer?

Leader: if several people say they were working on them, do not reassure. Say that is exactly what the next ten weeks are for, and move on.

WIN

- ▶ When has someone asked you for help, and the asking itself changed how you felt about them?
- ▶ Think of a conversation that got too personal too fast. What did you change the subject to?

BUILD

Read John 4:1-30 aloud with parts: a narrator, Jesus, and the woman. This is the longest conversation Jesus has with anyone in the Gospels, and it needs to be heard as a conversation rather than a text.

1. Verses 4 to 7. What condition is Jesus in when this begins, and what are his first words to her?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He is wearied from the journey and sitting down. It is about noon. And the first thing he says is "Give me a drink."

He opens by needing something. He does not lead with a claim, a diagnosis, or an invitation, and he has nothing to draw with, so the request is real. For a moment she is the one with the resources.

Note verse 4 as well: he "had to" pass through Samaria. The Greek is *edei*, the same word family as "I must stay at your house today" in Luke 19. It can carry Johannine purpose, and it can also mean ordinary

necessity; Samaria was the direct route. Offer the theological reading as a reading.

2. Verse 9. What barriers does the text itself name or imply between these two people?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

She names two: he is a Jew and she is a Samaritan, and she is a woman. The narrator underlines the first with the aside that Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

And verse 27 supplies a third from the outside: the disciples come back and marvel that he was talking with a woman, though none of them said anything.

Centuries of religious and ethnic hostility, a public conversation between a man and a woman alone, and a rabbi in long conversation with a woman alone. He crosses all of it in six words, and he crosses it by asking her for a favor.

3. Verses 10 to 15. She misunderstands him twice. Track it: what does she think he means, and what does he do each time she turns aside?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

At verse 9 she turns to ethnicity, and he answers with the gift of God and living water. At verse 11 she turns to logistics, that the well is deep and he has no bucket, and he answers with water welling up to eternal life.

"Living water" normally meant moving water, spring water rather than cistern water, so her reading is the ordinary one. St. John does this repeatedly: Nicodemus hears "born again" literally one chapter earlier. The misunderstanding is not stupidity; it is what happens when someone is being addressed above where they currently stand.

Notice he never chases her aside and never corrects her tone. He keeps climbing until she follows. And at verse 15 she does: "Sir, give me this water." She asked. Mark that verse, because the next question depends on it.

4. Verses 16 to 18. What does Jesus say about her life, and what does he not say?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He says "Go, call your husband," and when she answers honestly he states the fact: five husbands, and the man she has now is not her husband.

What he does not say is everything else. No adjective, no verdict, no exhortation, no call to repent of it, and he never returns to the subject for the rest of the chapter. He names it once, accurately, and stops.

And note the order, which almost everyone reverses when they retell this story. This comes at verse 16, after she asked him for the water at verse 15. He did not lead with it.

Say this part out loud. The text does not tell us her moral history. In that world a woman could not ordinarily initiate a divorce herself, though the legal picture was not uniform across the period. Five husbands could be consistent with widowhood, with being discarded repeatedly, or with a chaotic life. Preachers fill this gap constantly; the evangelist left it open. Ask the group what it means that we filled it in, and whether we do the same to the people on our own lists.

5. Verse 20. What does she do once the conversation has named her situation, and how does Jesus handle it?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

She turns to a theological controversy: our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you say Jerusalem. It reads to many as changing the subject, and it may equally be a real question put to someone she has just called a prophet. The text does not tell us.

This is what your friends will do too, and it usually arrives as a question about the Crusades, or the abuse crisis, or why God allows suffering. Some of those questions are sincere. Some are a place to stand that is not this close.

Watch what Jesus does. He does not call it a dodge, and he does not drag her back to the husbands. He answers it, and his answer is hard: "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews." Then he moves past the question to what it was actually about, worship in spirit and truth, and tells her the Father is seeking such people.

He answered the question and moved through it to what it was about. Both halves are the skill.

6. Verses 25 and 26. What does Jesus tell her, and who else in this Gospel has heard it yet?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"I who speak to you am he." In the Gospel of John this is the first time Jesus plainly tells anyone that he is the Messiah. Andrew used the title in 1:41; this is Jesus saying it himself.

Not to the crowd. Not to the authorities. Not to the Twelve, who are at that moment in town buying lunch. To a Samaritan woman, alone, at noon, at the end of a conversation that began with him asking her for a drink.

Let that sit for a moment before you move on. It says something about who the Gospel considers a suitable recipient.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Do not tell them. Send three readers.

Genesis 24:10-27, then Genesis 29:1-12, then Exodus 2:15-21. Read all three aloud, back to back.

Then ask one question: what keeps happening in these stories?

What they should find: a man travels to a foreign land, stops at a well, meets a woman there, water is drawn, the woman runs home to tell her household, and a betrothal follows. Abraham's servant and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah. It is a recognized pattern, and St. John's first readers would have known it the way we know the opening of a fairy tale.

Now ask: where is Jesus sitting in verse 6, and what happens in verse 28?

Then push it one step further. Look back one chapter, at John 3:29, where St. John the Baptist calls himself the friend of the bridegroom. Many readers see the evangelist invoking the well-betrothal pattern and placing the bridegroom at the well. If that reading is right, what is being offered to this woman is not only water. Give it to the group as a reading, which is what it is.

7. Verses 28 to 30 and 39 to 42. How does she evangelize, and what happens to her role at the end?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

She leaves her water jar, which is the detail St. John chose to keep. She came for water and went home without it.

And look at the form of what she says: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" An invitation and a question. Not an announcement, not an argument, and not a claim she was not yet in a position to make. She evangelized from inside what she actually knew.

Then verses 39 to 42. Many believed because of her word. Then the town came, heard him themselves, and told her that their faith no longer rested on what she said, because they had heard for themselves.

That sounds like a slight and it is not one. Her witness did exactly what witness is for: it brought them to him. Ask the group how they would feel on the receiving end of verse 42, and then ask whether that feeling is something to repent of.

8. Someone says: Jesus named her sin within six verses. All this friendship-first material is a modern evasion. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. The answer is not that he avoided it, and it is not that he led with it.

DIG DEEPER

Noon. Verse 6 says about the sixth hour. It is commonly said that women drew water in the morning and in company, and that she was avoiding people. That is an inference resting on a contested reconstruction of custom, and the text says nothing about her motive.

The Samaritan quarrel. 2 Kings 17:24-41 is important background rather than the whole origin; the Gerizim sanctuary and the later schism have their own complex history, and the Samaritans read it very differently. Her question in verse 20 is a live grievance, not a hypothetical.

Broken cisterns. Jeremiah 2:13. The living water language is not invented on the spot. Jeremiah is one likely background among several, and the image also carries cleansing, divine life, temple renewal and the Spirit.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build this properly. The person making it is usually the one in your parish who is tired of a Catholicism that never says anything.

He did raise it. Verse 16 is not ambiguous, and he did not soften it: five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. He knew, and he said so, to her face, in a first conversation.

And notice how fast. This is not a fifteen year friendship. It is one conversation at a well, and the sore spot is on the table before it is over. Whatever this passage teaches, it does not teach infinite delay.

Meanwhile the pastoral cost of the opposite error is real and everybody in the room has seen it. A

generation of Catholics have been accompanied warmly and at length by people who never once told them a difficult truth, and some of them have concluded, reasonably, that the difficult truths were never really believed.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First, the order. Verse 15 comes before verse 16. She asked him for the water, and then he said "Go, call your husband." He did not open with it, and he did not raise it until she had asked him for something. Anyone using this passage to justify leading with sin has to explain away the fifteen preceding verses.

Second, the manner. He states a fact and stops. No adjective, no verdict, no exhortation, no call to repentance attached, and he never mentions it again. Compare that to how most of us do it.

Third, what he did with her escape hatch at verse 20. He did not drag her back to the husbands. He took her theological question seriously, answered it without softening it, and moved through it. The sin was named once and then it was not the subject of the conversation. It was the door into it.

Fourth, the honest limit. The text does not tell us her moral history, and every reconstruction of it is ours. If we are willing to invent a backstory for a woman in Scripture in order to make a point about naming sin, we should ask what we are inventing about the three people on our list.

So: yes, name the true thing. This passage models patience, truth and prudence rather than issuing a formula, and note two limits. Jesus knew her life; you will usually only suspect. And the text never tells us her moral history, so be slower than he was, not faster.

SEND

- ▶ What is the question under the question, for one of the three people you are praying for? What are they really asking about?
- ▶ Verse 42 says the town stopped believing because of her and started believing because of him. Where in your life would you find that hardest to accept?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 4 of the ladder. One question that goes a layer deeper than you normally go, and then silence.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- With one of them this week, ask one question that goes one layer past where you usually stop. Not about faith. About their life, what they are carrying, what they actually hope for.
- Then stop talking. Do not fill the pause, do not solve it, and do not attach anything to it.
- If they deflect, do not chase it. Notice where they went, and let them stay there.
- Write down afterward: what did they ask for, if anything? Bring that back next week.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you asked her for a drink because you wanted her. Give us the humility to receive something from the people we hope to bring to you, and the courage, when the moment comes, to say the true thing once and then be quiet. Make our witness the road they walk to you, and make us glad of it. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"

John 4:29

Leader Reference Card

Give Me a Drink

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

Passage	Where and why
John 4:1-42	Primary text. Read verses 1 to 30 aloud with parts; read 39 to 42 aloud at Build 7.
John 3:29	Live discovery. The friend of the bridegroom, one chapter earlier.
John 3:1-8	Build 3. Nicodemus and the same literal misunderstanding device.
Luke 19:5	Build 1. The divine necessity behind "I must stay at your house today."
Genesis 24:10-27	Live discovery. Abraham's servant and Rebekah at the well.
Genesis 29:1-12	Live discovery. Jacob and Rachel at the well.
Exodus 2:15-21	Live discovery. Moses and the daughters of Reuel at the well.
Jeremiah 2:13	Old Testament Roots and Dig Deeper. The fountain of living waters and the broken cisterns.
Jeremiah 17:13; Isaiah 55:1	Old Testament Roots. Further living water texts.
Ezekiel 47:1-12; Zechariah 14:8	Old Testament Roots. Water flowing from the temple and from Jerusalem.
2 Kings 17:24-41	Dig Deeper. The origin of the Samaritan quarrel.

To an Unknown God

Movement Two: Creating Space for an Encounter · Acts 17:16-34

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover how the Gospel gets proposed to people who share no framework with us at all: Paul starts from what they already have, quotes what they already read, never opens an Old Testament, and still lands on repentance, judgment, and a man raised from the dead. Then discover what the normal result looks like.

Catholic Touchstone

The Church teaches definitively that God can be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason from created things, and she has long recognised seeds of truth and of the Word scattered outside her visible boundaries. The first is defined teaching; the second is a developed formulation. Grace builds on nature. That is why Paul could start with an altar instead of a proof text, and why he still had to get to the Resurrection.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

What Paul felt, and what Paul said

Verse 16: while he waited at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw the city full of idols. The Greek *parōxyneto* is strong: deeply provoked, indignant, distressed. Anger and exasperation are possible nuances rather than a settled emotional diagnosis.

Now read the speech. Luke records no outburst. He does not call them idolaters, does not open with judgment, and does not tell them how the city looks to him. His opposition does surface, at verses 29 to 31, as a conclusion rather than an opening. What he felt and what he said were not the same thing, and that gap is a discipline rather than a dishonesty.

This is worth naming for your group early. Most of us have the opposite problem: we feel mildly uncomfortable and say something scorching.

Where he worked, and what they called him

Verse 17: he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with whoever happened to be there. Note that Luke attaches "every day" to the marketplace. He did not wait to be invited.

Verse 18: Epicureans and Stoics take him on. Some say, "What would this babblers say?" The word is *spermologos*, literally a seed picker, a bird pecking up scraps, used of someone who collects bits of learning he does not really understand. It is contempt, and it is the first review Paul gets in Athens.

Others said he seemed to be a preacher of foreign divinities, "because he preached Jesus and the resurrection." Some scholars suggest they heard *Anastasis*, resurrection, as the name of a consort goddess alongside Jesus. It is a plausible and commonly offered suggestion, not a certainty; offer it that way if it comes up.

The opening move

"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, To an unknown god."

He had walked the city and looked at things. The opening is not a compliment strategy; it is the fruit of actually paying attention to what these people cared about. Then he takes one object out of their own city and says: what you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

A note for accuracy. Ancient writers do attest altars to unknown gods at Athens, and Paul's report is entirely plausible. There is no surviving inscription matching his exact singular wording. Say "ancient sources attest altars of this kind" rather than claiming archaeologists have found Paul's altar, because they have not.

What he actually argues, and what is missing

Verses 24 to 28: God made the world and everything in it; he is Lord of heaven and earth; he does not live in shrines made by man; he is not served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything; he made from one every nation of men; he determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God and perhaps feel after him and find him, yet he is not far from each one of us.

Now notice what is absent. He never quotes the Old Testament. Not once. To this audience he argues from creation, from human dependence, from the universal human search, and from their own literature. The content is thoroughly biblical, shaped by Scripture and Jewish monotheism; what he quotes and what he starts from are theirs.

Verse 28 quotes two lines. "In him we live and move and have our being" is traditionally attributed to Epimenides, and that attribution is old but not secure. "For we are indeed his offspring" is from the *Phaenomena* of Aratus, and that one is solid; a similar line appears in Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*. Give your group the difference between the two attributions honestly. It is a small worked example of the discipline this whole study is trying to teach.

Where he lands, and what he refuses to trim

Verses 29 to 31. Therefore we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. God overlooked the times of ignorance, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead.

Read that list again. Repentance, commanded, of everyone, everywhere. A fixed day of judgment. A man appointed as judge. A bodily resurrection offered as public assurance. There is not one soft word in it.

The poets gave him a point of contact. They bought him no discount. This is the sentence to have ready when somebody in your group worries that starting where people are means ending where they are.

The result, which is the point of the session

Verse 32: some mocked. Some said, "We will hear you again about this." Some joined him and believed, and Luke names two of them, Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris.

Three responses: derision, deferral, and faith. A mixed result like that is normal and unsurprising in Acts, and any group that measures itself against the about three thousand of Pentecost will quit somewhere in year two.

There is a longstanding preaching tradition that Athens was Paul's failure and that 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 is his repentance for it. Tonight's build-then-press takes that apart, so do not spend it here. Read the section before you lead.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The idol that has to be carried

Isaiah 44:9-20 is the great satire: a man cuts down a tree, burns half of it to warm himself and bake his bread, and worships what is left. See also Psalm 115:4-8 and Psalm 135:15-18, where the idols have mouths and do not speak, eyes and do not see, and those who make them become like them. Paul's "not served by human hands as though he needed anything" is standing squarely on this tradition, even though he never cites it.

Boundaries and allotted periods

Deuteronomy 32:8: when the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, he fixed the bounds of the peoples. Acts 17:26 stands close to that verse conceptually, offered to men who did not hold it as authoritative.

The nearest thing to Paul's argument in the Old Testament

This is tonight's live discovery, so do not spend it. The passage is Wisdom 13:1-9. Read it yourself before the session, next to Acts 17:26-29, and you will see why the group needs to find it rather than be handed it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Justin Martyr on the seeds of the Word

St. Justin Martyr, writing to defend Christians before a pagan public, teaches in substance that the Word who became flesh in Christ has scattered seeds of himself throughout the human race, so that whatever has been said well by anyone at all belongs by right to Christians.

This is the theological ground under Paul quoting Aratus. Justin does not treat pagan philosophy as equivalent to the fullness of revelation. He does go further than we might expect: at First Apology 46 he says that those who lived according to the Logos, naming Socrates and Heraclitus among the Greeks, were in a qualified sense Christians. His claim is that truth wherever it is found has one owner.

St. Justin Martyr, summarized from his Second Apology, with the seeds-of-the-Logos material conventionally located at chapters 8, 10 and 13, and First Apology 46 for the Logos and the philosophers. A faithful summary of his teaching, not a quotation; the Second Apology chapter divisions are editorial and vary between editions.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | The Second Vatican Council on what the Church does not reject

The Council taught that the Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in other religions, and regards with sincere reverence those ways of acting and living, and those precepts and teachings, which often reflect a ray of the Truth that enlightens all people.

Read the next clause too, because it is the one that gets dropped: the Council says this while announcing without ceasing that Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, in whom God has reconciled all things to himself. Paul does exactly this in one speech. He takes the altar seriously as a point of contact, and then tells

them to repent.

Second Vatican Council, Nostra Aetate 2 (1965).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Paul II on the modern Areopagus

St. John Paul II took this scene as a working image for the Church's situation now, writing that the first Areopagus of the modern age is the world of communications, and naming others: the commitment to peace, the rights of the person, the development of peoples, culture, and scientific research.

His point is that an Areopagus is any place where a culture does its actual thinking, and that the Church has to go and stand in it rather than waiting for it to come to the parish hall. Ask where your own Areopagus is. Most of us work in one.

St. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio 37 (1990).

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Church's confidence that you can begin a conversation about God with someone who has no Bible rests on these paragraphs.

- **CCC 27.** The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God.
- **CCC 32.** Starting from movement, becoming, contingency, and the order and beauty of the world, one can come to a knowledge of God as the origin and end of the universe.
- **CCC 36.** God can be known with certainty from created things by the natural light of human reason. This is taught by the Church and defined at the First Vatican Council; it is not a pious opinion.
- **CCC 28.** Throughout history, in their religions, people have given expression to their quest for God, in ways that are sometimes ambiguous. The Catechism does not flatten this in either direction.
- **CCC 843.** The Church recognizes in other religions a search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near.
- **CCC 856.** Missionary work requires respectful dialogue with those who do not yet accept the Gospel, and it does not stop at dialogue.
- Identifying your workplace as your Areopagus is our extension of these paragraphs and of Redemptoris Missio 37, not their wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Quiet tonight. Paul is a long way from Antioch and doing this alone in a marketplace. Do not comment.

Thread B, "Whose work is this?" Developed obliquely in verses 26 and 27: God fixed the periods and the boundaries so that they should seek him and perhaps feel after him. The seeking is arranged. Do not resolve.

Thread C, "The room you are afraid of." This is the thread's main development. Paul stands in one of the most intellectually formidable rooms in the ancient world, gets called a seed picker to his face, and keeps

going. If anyone in your group has a workplace or a family table they dread, tonight is their session.

Watch for. The mixed result in verse 32 is the pastoral payload. Someone in your group has already had a conversation that went badly and has concluded they are bad at this. Make sure verse 32 lands on them.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group notice the gap between verse 16 and the speech: what Paul felt and what he said were not the same thing.
2. Have them list what Paul argues from, and discover for themselves that the Old Testament is entirely absent.
3. Establish that he trimmed nothing: repentance, judgment, and resurrection are all in the last three verses.
4. Have them find Wisdom 13 next to Acts 17 and see the older Jewish argument Paul is standing in.
5. Dismantle the "Paul failed at Athens" reading using the text rather than by assertion.
6. Send them out to find one true thing in a friend's actual beliefs that they can honestly affirm.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Field report on rung four, the deeper question.
0:12-0:20	Win questions.
0:20-0:26	Read Acts 17:16-34 aloud in full.
0:26-0:38	Build 1 and 2, what Paul felt, where he worked, what they called him.
0:38-0:50	Build 3 and 4, the opening move and what he argues from.
0:50-1:00	Live discovery: Wisdom 13 beside Acts 17.
1:00-1:10	Build 5 and 6, the two quotations and where he lands.
1:10-1:16	Build 7, the three responses.
1:16-1:24	Build 8, the build-then-press on whether Athens was a failure.
1:24-1:30	Send questions, Live It This Week, take-homes, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Fold Build 5 (the two poets) into Build 4 and mention the Aratus and Epimenides difference in one sentence. Saves six minutes.
- Run the Wisdom discovery as a single reading of Wisdom 13:1-9 with no hunt, then ask the one question. Saves five minutes.
- Drop Build 2 and summarize *spermologos* yourself in thirty seconds. Saves six minutes.
- Do not cut Build 7 or Build 8. Verse 32 is why this session exists.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If someone concludes that Nostra Aetate means all religions are equally true, read the second half of the paragraph aloud, then read Acts 17:30. The Council and the Apostle both hold the two together, and so should the room.

If someone in the group has real intellectual training and starts running the session as a philosophy seminar, thank them and redirect with a question only the text can answer. This session attracts that, and it will eat the hour.

If someone says they could never do what Paul did because they are not smart enough, hold it. Do not reassure them tonight. Session 6 is built for exactly that person, and it will do a better job than you can do in ninety seconds.

If the room turns cynical about a culture that mocks, name it and turn it: Paul was insulted to his face by better educated men and kept going back to the marketplace daily. Contempt was the environment, not the verdict.

Discussion Guide

To an Unknown God

Acts 17:16-34

OPENING PRAYER

Lord God, you set the boundaries and the seasons so that people would reach out for you and perhaps find you, and you are never far from any one of us. Give us Paul's eyes this week, to walk through an ordinary place and actually see what people are worshiping. Give us his nerve to speak, and his patience with a room that laughs. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Five minutes. Two or three people.

Last week you asked one question that went a layer deeper, and then stopped talking. What did they ask for, if anything?

Leader: watch for anyone whose answer is about how the conversation made them feel rather than what the other person said. Ask them once, gently, what the other person actually said.

WIN

- ▶ Where do you spend time with people who share almost none of your assumptions? What is that room like?
- ▶ When has someone taken something you care about seriously before disagreeing with you? What did that do?

BUILD

Read Acts 17:16-34 aloud in full before any discussion. Ask the group to listen for one thing on the first pass: everything Paul refers to that the Athenians already had.

1. Verse 16. What is Paul feeling as he waits in Athens? Now read the speech again. Where does that feeling show up in it?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

His spirit was provoked within him. The Greek word is strong: deeply provoked or indignant. He is not intrigued by the architecture.

And Luke records no outburst. He never calls them idolaters, never opens with judgment, and never tells

them how their city looks to him. He does reach the point in verse 29, that the divine nature is not like gold or silver shaped by human art, but he arrives at it as a conclusion the audience has been walked toward rather than as an accusation he opened with.

Name the discipline out loud, because it is the reverse of most of our habits: he felt strongly and spoke carefully. Most of us feel mildly and speak carelessly.

2. Verses 17 and 18. Where does Paul do this work, and what do they call him?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

In the synagogue with those who already shared his Scriptures, and in the marketplace every day with whoever happened to be there. Luke attaches the daily note to the marketplace, and Paul did not wait for an invitation.

They call him a *spermologos*, a seed picker: a bird pecking up scraps, used of somebody who collects fragments of learning he does not really understand. It is contempt, and it is the first review he gets.

Ask the group what they would have done next. Luke tells us he was reasoning in the marketplace every day.

3. Verses 22 and 23. What is his opening move, and where did he get the material for it?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He tells them they are very religious, and then cites an altar he found while walking through their city, inscribed to an unknown god. What you worship as unknown, he says, I proclaim to you.

The material came from paying attention. He had walked the city and looked at things, and the opening line of the most famous evangelistic speech in Acts is the fruit of that walk.

One accuracy note for the room. Ancient writers do attest altars to unknown gods at Athens, so Paul's report is entirely plausible, but no surviving inscription matches his exact wording. Say that ancient sources attest altars of this kind. Do not say archaeologists have found Paul's altar, because they have not.

4. Verses 24 to 28. Make a list: what does Paul actually tell them about God? Then make a second list: what is he arguing from?

Do this on paper or a whiteboard. The second list is where the session turns.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

What he tells them: God made the world and everything in it, is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines built by hands, is not served by human hands as though he needed anything, gives everyone life and breath, made every nation from one, set their times and boundaries so that they would seek him, and is not far from any one of us.

What he argues from: creation, human dependence, the universal human search, and their own poets.

Now the second list's most important entry is the one that is missing. He never quotes the Old Testament. Not once, in the whole speech. The content is thoroughly biblical, shaped by Scripture and Jewish monotheism; what he quotes and what he starts from are theirs.

Ask the group directly: what does that mean for a conversation with someone who does not accept the Bible as authoritative?

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Do not tell them. Send them to it.

Have someone read Acts 17:26-29 aloud again. Then have a second person read Wisdom 13:1-9.

Ask: what is the same?

What they should find: Wisdom argues that people who studied the world and did not find its Maker are foolish, that they were misled by beautiful things into worshiping them, and, in a striking turn, that these people are "little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him." Acts 17:27 says God arranged the world so that they should seek him and perhaps feel after him and find him. The argument, the sympathy, and even the "perhaps" line up.

Then give them the honest limit. The parallel is real and widely noticed. Whether Paul is consciously drawing on the Book of Wisdom, or whether both are working from a shared Hellenistic Jewish argument about the pagans, is genuinely debated. Do not claim direct dependence. Claim what you can see: this speech stands inside an older Jewish tradition of arguing with pagans sympathetically.

5. Verse 28. He quotes two lines of poetry. What does it mean that Paul had read their poets?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

It means he knew their poetry well enough to quote it aptly, and knew what it meant to the people who loved it. Whether he read the complete works or met the lines through education and common culture, the text does not say.

"For we are indeed his offspring" comes from the *Phaenomena* of Aratus, and a similar line appears in Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*. That attribution is solid. "In him we live and move and have our being" is traditionally attributed to Epimenides, and that attribution is old but not secure.

Give the group both, with the difference. It is a small worked example of the discipline this whole study is asking of them: say what you know at the strength you know it. Paul quoting a poet accurately is more useful than any of us quoting one confidently and wrongly.

6. Verses 29 to 31. Where does the speech end up? Make a list of everything he refuses to leave out.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

That the divine nature is not an object shaped by human art. That God commands all people everywhere to repent. That there is a fixed day of judgment. That a man has been appointed to judge. That God has given public assurance of this by raising him from the dead.

There is not one soft word in that list. Repentance, commanded, of everyone. A fixed day. A judge. A bodily resurrection.

This is the sentence to send home: the poets gave him a point of contact; they bought him no discount.

Starting where people are does not mean ending where they are.

7. Verses 32 to 34. How many different responses does Luke report, and what does he bother to record?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Three. Some mocked. Some said they would hear him again about this. Some joined him and believed.

And Luke names two of them: Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris. Luke does not usually stop to name people unless it matters to him that they are remembered.

Three responses, from one speech, by one of the most capable evangelists in the book. Say that plainly to a room that has already had conversations go badly.

8. Someone says: Athens was Paul's failure. He got clever, quoted poets, and converted almost nobody, and afterward he wrote that he had decided to know nothing except Christ crucified. The lesson is to skip the culture and preach the cross. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. This is a widely preached reading, it is sincerely held, and the text does not support it.

DIG DEEPER

The seed picker. *Spermologos* was contempt, and it is worth noticing that the Athenians' dismissal of Paul was about his sources: they thought he had picked up scraps he did not understand. He answered by quoting their literature accurately.

A goddess named Resurrection. Some scholars suggest that when the Athenians heard "Jesus and the *anastasis*" they took it as a pair of foreign divinities, a god and his consort. It is a plausible and commonly offered reading; the text does not confirm it.

Dionysius and Damaris. Later tradition made Dionysius the first bishop of Athens, and much later a body of mystical writings was circulated under his name; those writings are now universally recognized as the work of a much later author, conventionally called Pseudo-Dionysius. If someone in your group has read the *Mystical Theology*, this is worth clearing up.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it at full strength; it has more going for it than most people realize.

The chronology is real. Acts 18:1 has Paul leave Athens and go straight to Corinth, and 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 has him telling the Corinthians that he came to them without lofty words or wisdom, having decided to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Athens, then Corinth, then that sentence. The sequence is right there.

The results look thin. Two named converts and some others, against about three thousand at Pentecost. And the sophisticated crowd laughed, which is exactly what you might expect when a preacher tries to impress intellectuals on their own ground.

And the strongest form of the objection is textual rather than historical. Read 1 Corinthians 1:17-25: Paul contrasts eloquent wisdom with preaching Christ crucified, and says the cross is folly to Greeks. Now read the Areopagus speech and notice that it never names Jesus and never mentions the cross. The objector can point at the exact thing that is missing. The danger it points to is also genuine. The history of missions is full of contextualization that started as a bridge and ended as a dissolution, where the Gospel was translated into the local idiom so successfully that nothing distinctive survived.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First: Luke never says it failed. He reports mockery, deferral, and belief, and then he stops to name two converts. Luke does not hand out names casually. Whatever the narrator thought of Athens, he thought it produced people worth remembering.

Second: the connection to 1 Corinthians 2 is an inference laid on top of two texts, not something either text says. Paul gives no hint that he is correcting a previous strategy. Read 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 in context and his target is the Corinthians' own appetite for rhetorical showmanship and factional loyalty to impressive speakers. He is describing the manner of his preaching against their taste for performance, not repenting of a method.

Third, look at what he actually preached in Athens. Repentance commanded of everyone, a fixed day of judgment, an appointed judge, and a bodily resurrection. He got mocked for the Resurrection, which is precisely the part the objection accuses him of trimming. **And now the honest concession, which the objection has earned.** The speech as Luke records it never names Jesus and never mentions the cross. That is a real absence and you should say so plainly rather than dance around it. Two things bear on it. Luke tells us at 17:18 that Paul had already been preaching Jesus and the resurrection in the agora before he was brought to the Areopagus, so the recorded address is not the whole of what he said there. And Luke himself never presents the episode as a failure. But the objector is right that the cross is not in the speech.

So what does the passage teach? Two things. That you may start anywhere your hearer actually stands, including their own poets. And that the result will usually be mixed, because it was mixed for Paul in one of the great recorded addresses of the New Testament.

One honest concession to the objector: the danger of dissolving into the culture is real, and this study will keep insisting on the Resurrection as the non-negotiable. Paul is the proof that you can do both.

SEND

- ▶ Where is your Areopagus? Name the actual room, and name what is worshiped there.
- ▶ What is one thing the people you work with genuinely believe that is true, and that you could affirm honestly rather than strategically?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 5 of the ladder. Find the altar. This week you go looking for what somebody already has.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Ask one of the three what they actually believe about God, or about what happens when we die, or about what makes a life good. Ask as though you do not already know the answer, because you probably do not.
- Do not correct anything. Not one thing, not even gently.
- Afterward, write down one thing they said that is true, and that you could affirm honestly and without strategy. If you cannot find one, that is a finding too; bring it back.
- Optional, and worth it: spend twenty minutes with something they love. A show, a podcast, a book, a band. Paul knew their poetry.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God, you are not far from any one of us, and you set the times and the boundaries so that people would reach out and find you. Forgive us for the times we have been provoked and let it show. Give us eyes to see the altars in the places we walk through every day, and courage to name the God whom people are worshiping without knowing. And when they laugh, send us back into the same room. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"That they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us."

Acts 17:27

SESSION 5 | PART THREE

Leader Reference Card

To an Unknown God

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

Passage	Where and why
Acts 17:16-34	Primary text, read aloud in full at the start.
Acts 18:1	Build 8. Paul leaves Athens for Corinth.
1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5	Build 8, the objection at full strength and the answer. Read 2:1-2 in its context.
Wisdom 13:1-9	Live discovery. The older Jewish argument with the pagans, including the sympathetic "perhaps."
Isaiah 44:9-20	Old Testament Roots. The idol maker who burns half the tree.
Psalms 115:4-8	Old Testament Roots. Idols with mouths that do not speak.
Psalms 135:15-18	Old Testament Roots. Those who make them become like them.
Deuteronomy 32:8	Old Testament Roots. The Most High fixing the bounds of the peoples, behind Acts 17:26.
Acts 2:41	Build 7. The three thousand, for the comparison the group will make anyway.

Leader Preparation Guide

One Thing I Know

Movement Two: Creating Space for an Encounter · John 9

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover, by tracking two lists side by side, that the man born blind grows steeply in what he confesses while his courage runs far ahead of what he can actually report, that he defeats trained experts using the single fact he possesses, and that he is thrown out of the synagogue for a man he could not yet have identified in a crowd.

Catholic Touchstone

Every baptized person shares in Christ's prophetic office and can bear witness by word and by life. Witness is not the same thing as expertise. The Church's own proclamation is testimony to an event before it is an argument about a doctrine.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The shape of the chapter

John 9 is built in scenes, and it rewards being read as drama: the disciples' question (1-5), the healing (6-7), the neighbors (8-12), the Pharisees' first interrogation (13-17), the parents (18-23), the second interrogation (24-34), Jesus finding him (35-38), and the closing exchange on blindness (39-41).

Notice that Jesus is absent from the middle of his own chapter. From verse 8 to verse 34 the man is on his own, and that is where all the pressure falls. That is also where most of your group lives.

The question Jesus refuses

"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus refuses the framework: it was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.

Handle this carefully, because it is easy to over-read in two directions. Jesus is not teaching a general theory that suffering is never connected to anyone's sin; he is refusing the retributive calculus in this case. And he is not saying God blinded a child in order to stage a miracle later. The Catechism is honest that the question of evil has no quick answer (see CCC 309), and it is better to say less here than to resolve it cheaply.

There is a Dig Deeper below on a proposed alternative punctuation of verses 3 and 4. Offer it as a proposal, not a solution.

Clay, and a pool called Sent

He spat on the ground, made clay, anointed the man's eyes, and told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. St. John stops the narrative to gloss the name: Siloam means Sent.

That gloss is not decoration. This Gospel calls Jesus the one sent by the Father again and again, dozens of times, and here a blind man is sent to a pool named Sent and comes back seeing. In a study about being sent, notice that the first thing the man ever does in obedience is go somewhere.

The clay has attracted attention since the second century, because Genesis 2:7 has God forming man from the dust of the ground. St. Irenaeus makes the connection explicitly. Offer it as a patristic reading with real weight rather than as something St. John states.

Two lists, running in opposite directions

This is the engine of the session. Have the group build both lists.

What he confesses, rising: "The man called Jesus made clay" (v11). "He is a prophet" (v17). "One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see" (v25). "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (v33). "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him (v38).

What he still cannot report: where Jesus is (v12). Whether Jesus is a sinner (v25). And at v36 he has to ask who the Son of man is, because he has never seen the man's face. Note that his understanding does advance -- v33 is a real inference -- so the point is not that his knowledge is frozen, but that his courage runs far ahead of it.

Put those together and you get the point of the chapter for an evangelization study. He is expelled from the synagogue in verse 34 for a man he cannot identify until verse 37. His courage ran well ahead of his information.

The parents, and the cost

Verses 18 to 23. His parents confirm only what cannot be denied, that he is their son and was born blind, and then hand the question back: "he is of age, ask him." St. John tells us why: they feared being put out of the synagogue.

This is the first hard cost in the study. Confession has a price, and here the price falls on a family. Do not moralize at the parents in front of your group. Some people in that room have parents who did the same thing, and some of them are the parents.

A necessary note. In this chapter the term "the Jews" refers contextually to the hostile authorities of that time and place, not to the Jewish people. That is an exegetical judgment about this chapter; CCC 597 and *Nostra Aetate* 4 make the separate and binding point about collective guilt. Jesus, his mother, the apostles, and the man himself are all Jews. Say this out loud in the session; it is a small sentence that prevents real harm. See CCC 597 and *Nostra Aetate* 4.

The credential attack, and what it accomplishes

In verses 30 to 33 the man actually argues, and he wins: you do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes; God does not listen to sinners; never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind; if this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

They have no answer, so they go after him instead: "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out. Note the move, because your group will meet it: when the argument fails, the credentials of the speaker come under attack.

Then verse 35, which is the sentence to end on: "Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said..." Being thrown out is what put him in the path of Christ. He did not lose by losing.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Opening blind eyes is God's work

Isaiah 35:5, Isaiah 42:6-7, Isaiah 29:18, and Psalm 146:8 all treat the opening of blind eyes as something God does, and Isaiah attaches it to the messianic age. This is tonight's live discovery, and the discovery works by what the group fails to find rather than by what they find, so do not preview it.

Clay from the ground

Genesis 2:7: the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The Fathers read the clay of John 9 against this, so that the healing is the Creator completing his own work rather than repairing someone else's. St. Irenaeus argues it directly. Present it as a patristic reading with real weight, not as something the evangelist says.

Shepherds who drive out the wounded

Ezekiel 34 again, from Session 3. The authorities cast out a man who had just been healed, which is a compelling thematic echo of Ezekiel's indictment of the shepherds of Israel, and prepares for John 10. It is not an accident that John 10, the Good Shepherd discourse, begins in the next breath with no scene change.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Irenaeus on the clay

St. Irenaeus teaches in substance that the same hand which formed man from the dust of the earth at the beginning is the hand that made clay and completed what was missing in this man's eyes, so that the healing shows the Creator finishing his own work rather than mending another's.

His larger argument is aimed at those who said the God of creation and the Father of Jesus Christ were two different Gods. The clay is his evidence: the one who made the eyes is the one who opened them.

St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies 5.15.2. A faithful summary of his argument, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine on a confession that grows

Preaching through this Gospel, St. Augustine teaches in substance that the man's confession climbs by stages, from a man called Jesus, to a prophet, to one who must be from God, to Lord, and that the light came into his heart more slowly than it came into his eyes.

He also dwells on St. John's gloss that Siloam means Sent, and takes it as pointing to Christ himself, the one sent by the Father, in whom the man is washed.

St. Augustine, summarized from his Tractates on the Gospel of John. A faithful summary of his teaching, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope St. Paul VI on witness, and on its limits

Pope St. Paul VI taught that the Gospel must first be proclaimed by witness, by a life that raises unavoidable questions in the people who see it: why are they like this, what or who is it that inspires them.

And then he said the part that is usually left out. Even the finest witness remains insufficient by itself, because the good news must eventually be proclaimed in words, and the name and the teaching and the life

and the promises and the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth have to be announced. The man born blind is exactly this: something happened to him, and then he had to open his mouth about it.

Pope St. Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi 21 and 22 (1975).

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Church treats testimony as a duty of the ordinary baptized, not a specialization, and these paragraphs are where she says so.

- **CCC 905.** Lay people fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, that is, by the proclamation of Christ both by the testimony of life and by the spoken word. Both, not one or the other.
- **CCC 2471.** Before Pilate, Christ declares that he came into the world to bear witness to the truth. The Christian is not to be ashamed of testifying to the Lord.
- **CCC 2472.** The duty of Christians is to bear witness to the Gospel in words and deeds, and this witness is a transmission of the faith.
- **CCC 1502.** Israel discovered that illness is mysteriously linked to sin and evil, while also learning that suffering can have a redemptive meaning. The Catechism is careful here, and so should you be at verse 2.
- **CCC 309.** The Catechism states plainly that there is no quick answer to the question of evil. Resist the urge to supply one at verse 3.
- **CCC 597.** Responsibility for the death of Jesus cannot be laid on the Jews of Jerusalem as a whole, still less on Jews of later times and places. Keep this in mind whenever this chapter says "the Jews."
- Applying this chapter to a coworker who asks you a question you cannot answer is our extension of these paragraphs, not their wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Tonight it inverts and this is the sharpest version yet: the man is sent to the pool before he has ever seen Jesus, and he recognises and believes only at verse 38, after everything has cost him, though Jesus was physically with him back at verses 6 and 7. Do not name it. Let verse 35 do the work.

Thread B, "Whose work is this?" Verse 3, "that the works of God might be made manifest in him," and verse 35, where Jesus is the one who goes and finds him. The man does not find Jesus once in this chapter. Do not resolve; you are one session away.

Thread C, "The room you are afraid of." The interrogation is the thread's most concrete appearance. If someone in your group is genuinely afraid of being asked a question they cannot answer, tonight is built for them, and the answer arrives in Build 4 rather than from you.

Sealed sheet. Three sessions out. Do not mention it tonight, and if someone asks, say only that it is coming.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group build the two lists themselves, rising confession against flat knowledge, and see the gap.
2. Establish that the man's strength was staying inside his own competence, and that "I do not know" is a complete and honorable sentence.
3. Have them search the Old Testament for a human being who opened the eyes of someone born blind, find nothing, and realize that this absence is the man's own argument in verse 32.
4. Name the credential attack in verse 34 so they recognize it when it happens to them.
5. Handle "the Jews" in this chapter accurately and out loud.
6. Send everyone home with one sentence: their own "one thing I know."

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Field report on rung five, finding the altar.
0:12-0:20	Win questions.
0:20-0:30	Read John 9 aloud with parts. Assign narrator, Jesus, the man, the Pharisees, the parents.
0:30-0:38	Build 1 and 2, the disciples' question and the pool called Sent.
0:38-0:54	Build 3 and 4, the two lists. Give this the time; it is the session.
0:54-1:02	Live discovery: search for a human who opened blind eyes.
1:02-1:12	Build 5 and 6, the parents and the argument he wins.
1:12-1:18	Build 7, the credential attack and verse 35.
1:18-1:26	Build 8, the build-then-press on formation before witness.
1:26-1:30	Send questions, Live It This Week, take-homes, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Read only verses 1 to 12 and 24 to 38 aloud, summarizing the first interrogation and the parents yourself. Saves six minutes.
- Drop Build 5 (the parents); the take-home recap already carries it. Saves eight minutes, though it costs the session its one moment of real sympathy for the frightened.
- Run the live discovery as a single assertion with two references. Saves six minutes and costs a lot; try to keep it.
- Do not cut Build 4 or Build 8. Those two are why this session is in the study.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If someone tries to settle the problem of suffering off verse 3, stop it gently and read CCC 309: there is no quick answer. Say that Jesus answers the blame question they asked and declines to supply a general account of suffering, and that this is deliberate. Then move on. This session cannot carry a theodicy and will be ruined by attempting one.

If someone in the group has a disability, or a child with one, verse 2 may land badly no matter how carefully you handle it. Say out loud that Jesus rejects the premise that the blindness was punishment. Do not let the room speculate.

If a well read person starts arguing that the man is a symbol rather than a person, agree that the chapter is deeply symbolic and insist that it is also about a man who lost his synagogue. Both, or the session collapses into allegory and nobody goes home changed.

When "the Jews" appears in the reading, give the note the first time and do not belabor it afterward.

Discussion Guide

One Thing I Know

John 9

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you made clay and sent a man who could not see you to go and wash, and he obeyed a voice he had never seen the face of. Give us that obedience. And when we are asked things we cannot answer, keep us honest, keep us inside what we actually know, and do not let us be ashamed of how little that is. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Five minutes. Two or three people.

Last week you asked someone what they actually believe, and looked for one true thing you could affirm honestly. Did you find one?

Leader: if someone says they could not find anything true in what their friend believes, do not argue. Ask them one question: what does your friend love? Then move on.

WIN

- ▶ When have you been asked a question about your faith that you could not answer? What did you do?
- ▶ Think of someone with no training who told you something true about their own life, and it landed harder than an expert would have. What made it work?

BUILD

Read John 9 aloud with parts: a narrator, Jesus, the man, the Pharisees, and the parents. It is a play, and it will not work read flat. Ask the group to read it in one sitting.

1. Verses 1 to 3. What framework do the disciples bring to this man, and what does Jesus do with it?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They bring a closed question with two options: this man sinned, or his parents did. Suffering must be somebody's fault, and the only interesting question is whose.

Jesus rejects both options. "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him."

Be careful with what you do next. He is refusing the retributive calculus in this case. He is not laying

down a general rule that suffering is never connected to anyone's sin, and he is not saying God blinded a child so that a miracle could be staged later. The Catechism says outright that there is no quick answer to the question of evil (CCC 309). Say so, and resist the urge to improve on that.

Notice too that the disciples are looking at a human being and seeing a theological puzzle. Ask the group whether that ever happens to the people on their lists.

2. Verses 6 and 7. What does Jesus make, and what does St. John stop the story to tell us about the pool?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He spits on the ground, makes clay, anoints the man's eyes, and sends him to wash. And St. John interrupts his own narrative to gloss the name: Siloam means Sent.

That gloss is doing work. This Gospel calls Jesus the one sent by the Father over and over, and here a blind man is sent to a pool called Sent and comes back seeing.

And notice the first act of obedience in the man's life: he goes somewhere, on the word of someone he has never seen, with mud on his face. Ask the group how that would feel walking through a neighborhood that knew him.

3. Now build a list together. Every time the man says something about who Jesus is, write it down in order: verses 11, 17, 25, 33, and 38.

Do this on a whiteboard or a shared sheet. The next question builds the second column, so leave room.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Verse 11: "The man called Jesus made clay." Verse 17: "He is a prophet." Verse 25: "One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see." Verse 33: "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." Verse 38: "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

That is a rising line, and every step up happens under interrogation. The pressure did not break his confession; it built it.

Note what verse 25 is doing in the middle of the list. It is not a claim about Jesus at all. It is a report about himself, and it is the strongest thing he says all chapter.

4. Now the second column. Every time the man says he does not know something: verses 12, 25, and 36. What does that column look like next to the first one?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Verse 12: where is he? "I do not know." Verse 25: is he a sinner? "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know." Verse 36: "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"

The second column stays thin. He is expelled from the synagogue in verse 34 for a man whose face he has never seen and whom he cannot identify until verse 37. Be precise here: his understanding does climb, and verse 33 is a genuine inference. What stays thin is what he can actually report.

This is the session. His courage ran far ahead of his information. Say that to the person in your room who

is convinced they do not know enough.

And notice the shape of his strength: he stayed inside what he actually knew and refused to be dragged outside it. "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I know." The moment you claim more than you have, you can be broken. He never gave them the opening.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

This discovery works by coming up empty. Do not warn them.

Read verse 32 aloud: "Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind."

Then send them looking. Give them Isaiah 35:5, Isaiah 42:6-7, Isaiah 29:18, and Psalm 146:8, and ask: who opens the eyes of a man born blind in the Old Testament?

Then ask the real question: can you find anywhere in the Old Testament where a human being opens the eyes of a man born blind?

What they should find: nothing that matches. Prophets raise the dead, heal leprosy, multiply oil and meal. Nobody opens the eyes of a man born blind. Two near-misses are worth naming so the group does not think we have cheated: in Tobit 11:7-13 Tobias restores his father's sight, and in 2 Kings 6:18-20 the Arameans are struck blind and then have their sight restored through Elisha. Neither is a man blind from birth. That is the whole force of verse 32, and it is why the man's own wording is careful.

Then land it. That absence is precisely the argument the man makes in verse 32, and he makes it without training, without a scroll in front of him, and without a single credential. He reasoned from the one fact he had, and it was enough to leave the experts with nothing to say.

5. Verses 18 to 23. What do the parents confirm, what do they refuse, and why?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They confirm only what cannot be denied: he is our son, and he was born blind. Then they hand it back: "he is of age, ask him."

St. John tells us why. They feared the authorities, who had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus as Christ would be put out of the synagogue. Exclusion of this kind could mean severe loss of religious and communal life; the precise institutional scope in this period is debated among historians.

Do not let the room moralize at them. Some people here have parents who did the same thing, and some are the parents. Ask instead: what is the equivalent cost in your world, and who would pay it?

One note to give out loud. In this chapter the term refers to the hostile authorities of that particular place and moment. Jesus, his mother, the apostles, and this man are all Jews. See CCC 597.

6. Verses 30 to 33. He stops answering questions and makes an argument. What is the argument actually built out of?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Out of his own experience together with premises he presents as shared religious knowledge. You do not

know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. God does not listen to sinners, which he offers as something everyone in the room accepts. Nobody has ever opened the eyes of a man born blind. Therefore, if this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

Every premise is either something he personally experienced or something he presents as common religious knowledge. Note that the text does not say his opponents conceded any of it; they revile him and throw him out. He never argues from a text he has not read or a doctrine he does not hold.

And it works. They have no answer. Reasoning carefully from what you actually know is available to anyone in the room, and it is far more durable than repeating an argument you borrowed.

7. Verse 34, and then verse 35. What do they do when the argument fails, and what happens next?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They attack him instead: "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out. When the argument fails, the credentials of the speaker come under attack. Your group will meet this, and it helps enormously to have a name for it in advance.

Then verse 35: "Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said to him..." Jesus goes looking for him. Being thrown out is what put him in the path of Christ.

Say the last part plainly. The man loses his synagogue, and in the same paragraph he gains the one who made him. He did not lose by losing.

8. Someone says: you should not evangelize until you actually know your faith. Half-informed Catholics saying wrong things do real damage. Learn first, speak later. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. The objection is half right, and the correct fix is not silence.

DIG DEEPER

A proposed punctuation. The oldest Greek manuscripts carry no punctuation, and some scholars propose reading verses 3 and 4 as: "neither this man sinned nor his parents; but that the works of God might be made manifest in him, we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day." That reading removes the suggestion that the man was blinded in order to stage a display. It is a genuine proposal, held by serious scholars, and it is not the majority rendering in English Bibles. Offer it as a possibility, not a solution.

The clay and the dust. Genesis 2:7 has God forming man from the dust of the ground. The Fathers read John 9 against it, so that the healing is the Creator completing his own work. St. Irenaeus argues this directly. It is a patristic reading with real weight, and St. John does not say it.

Where chapter 10 begins. There is no scene change between the end of chapter 9 and the Good Shepherd discourse. Jesus starts talking about shepherds who do not care for the sheep immediately after the authorities throw a healed man into the street. Read the last verse of 9 and the first verses of 10 together and the connection is unmistakable.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it at full strength. The person raising this is usually the most serious person in your parish about formation, and they are not wrong about the damage.

St. Peter says to be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for your hope (1 Peter 3:15). Prepared is his word. The Church trains catechists, examines them, and requires real formation of those entrusted with OCIA catechesis, because content matters and errors are costly.

And the damage is concrete. A Catholic who says something confused about the Eucharist, or about who can be saved, or about Mary, can set a friend back years, and the friend will remember the wrong thing far longer than any correction.

There is a further problem with using this chapter as a counterexample: the man had a miracle. Most of us do not. It is easy to testify when something undeniable has happened to your body. Building a program on a case that extraordinary is not obviously wise.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First, look again at the second column. He does not know where Jesus is, does not know whether Jesus is a sinner, and does not know who Jesus is even after being expelled for him. If knowledge were the entry requirement, this man does not qualify at any point before verse 37.

Second, look at what he does with what little he has. He reports. "One thing I know." He stays inside his own competence and refuses to be pulled outside it, and that is exactly why they cannot beat him. Overclaiming is what gets people broken in these conversations, not underclaiming.

Third, look at verses 30 to 33. He does argue, and he wins, and every premise is either his own experience or something his opponents already grant. That kind of reasoning does not require a degree. It requires honesty about what you actually have.

So the fix is not silence, and it is not bluffing. It is precision about your own competence. "I do not know, let me find out, and I will come back to you" is a complete and honorable sentence, and this study is going to keep asking your people to say it.

And give the objector their due. Formation matters, which is why serious catechesis exists and why this catalog has two whole books on Catholic apologetics. But formation is not the entry requirement for testimony. It is what testimony grows into. Nobody in this chapter waits to understand before speaking, including the man who ends up on his knees.

SEND

- ▶ What is your "one thing I know"? Not your best argument. What has actually happened to you.
- ▶ Where in your life have you stayed quiet because you were afraid of the second question rather than the first?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 6 of the ladder. Write your one sentence. This is the first rung where something of yours goes on paper.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Write one sentence: "One thing I know..." No theology, no argument, no verse. What has actually happened to you because of Jesus Christ. If it takes more than two lines, it is not finished yet.
- Practice saying it out loud, alone, until it does not sound rehearsed. This is not silly. Most people have never once said such a sentence aloud.
- Then find the honest limits of it. Write down two questions you would not be able to answer if someone pushed back on your sentence. Do not go and research them yet. Just name them.
- Bring the sentence next week. You will not be made to read it out.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you found a man who had just lost everything for your sake and had never once seen your face. Find us. Give us the courage to say the little we know and the honesty to admit where it runs out. And when we are asked a question we cannot answer, keep us from bluffing and keep us from silence. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see."

John 9:25

SESSION 6 | PART THREE

Leader Reference Card

One Thing I Know

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

Passage	Where and why
John 9	Primary text, read aloud with parts.
John 10:1-16	Dig Deeper. The Good Shepherd discourse, which begins with no scene change.
Genesis 2:7	Old Testament Roots and Voices of the Church. Man formed from the dust of the ground.
Isaiah 35:5	Live discovery. The eyes of the blind opened in the age to come.
Isaiah 42:6-7	Live discovery. The servant given to open the eyes that are blind.
Isaiah 29:18	Live discovery. The eyes of the blind shall see out of gloom and darkness.
Psalms 146:8	Live discovery. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
Tobit 11:7-13	Live discovery, near-miss. Tobias restores his father's sight; Tobit was not blind from birth.
2 Kings 6:18-20	Live discovery, near-miss. The Arameans struck blind and restored; not blindness from birth.
Ezekiel 34:1-6	Old Testament Roots. Shepherds who do not seek the lost or bind up the crippled.
1 Peter 3:15	Build 8, the objection at full strength. Be prepared to make a defense.

Leader Preparation Guide

Cut to the Heart

Movement Three: The Proposal and Surrender · Acts 2:14-41

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover what the first Christian sermon actually contained by taking it apart line by line, and notice two things the group will not expect: it is almost entirely a report of events rather than a list of instructions, and the demand for a response comes out of the crowd's mouth before it comes out of Peter's.

Catholic Touchstone

The initial proclamation, what the Church calls the kerygma, announces an event before it asks for anything. And the Church proposes; she imposes nothing. Both halves matter tonight, because Catholics tend to fail on one side or the other: either we never make the proposal, or we make it as a demand.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The shape of the sermon

Map it before you lead. Verses 14 to 21 explain the phenomenon from Joel. Verses 22 to 24 state what happened to Jesus of Nazareth. Verses 25 to 32 argue the Resurrection from Psalm 16 and the fact of David's tomb. Verses 33 to 35 establish the exaltation from Psalm 110. Verse 36 draws the conclusion. Verse 37 is the crowd's reaction. Verses 38 to 40 are Peter's answer to their question. Verse 41 is the result.

Peter does issue imperatives before verse 38 -- give ear at v14, hear these words at v22, let all the house of Israel know assuredly at v36 -- but every one of them is an instruction to listen or to recognise. No command to repent or to take a concrete step arrives before verse 38. That distinction is the point, and state it that way.

Two things said in one sentence

Verse 23 is the sentence to slow down on: this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, whom they crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God's plan and real human responsibility, in a single breath, with no attempt to resolve the tension. Note carefully that this is a corporate accusation; CCC 597 says the personal guilt of the participants is known to God alone and forbids laying blame on the Jews of Jerusalem as a whole. Peter does not say they were merely instruments and therefore innocent, and he does not say the crucifixion caught God by surprise. Both stand.

Handle this carefully in the room. The Catechism holds the same two things: the death of Jesus is part of God's plan (CCC 599, 600), and no collective guilt may be laid on the Jewish people, in that generation or any other (CCC 597). And then CCC 598 turns the knife toward us, saying the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the heaviest responsibility, because our sins are involved. Have that paragraph ready, because "you crucified" is a sentence a modern room will react to.

Peter argues, he does not simply assert

Verses 25 to 31 are a real argument. David wrote that God would not let his Holy One see corruption. But David died, was buried, and his tomb is in Jerusalem and everyone listening knows where it is. Therefore he was not speaking about himself. Therefore he was speaking about the Christ.

The premises are a text his audience accepts and a fact they can verify by walking across the city. That is the same structure as the man born blind in Session 6: reason from what your hearer already grants.

Then verse 32: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses." The argument from Scripture is joined to eyewitness testimony. Neither alone.

The comparison your group should make

Peter's sermon is roughly a third Old Testament quotation. Paul at the Areopagus in Session 5 quoted none at all, and used Greek poets instead.

Same Gospel, same Resurrection, same call to repentance, two entirely different toolkits, chosen by audience. This is the clearest evidence in the New Testament that starting where people stand is apostolic practice rather than modern accommodation.

Who asks first

Verse 37: "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?"

The verb behind "cut to the heart" carries the sense of being pierced, and describes profound distress or compunction. It does not exclude conviction; it tells you the conviction went in deep.

And notice the order, which is the same order you have now seen three times in this study. Philip made his claim and then invited (Session 1). Jesus let the Samaritan woman ask for the water before he named her life (Session 4). Peter announced who Jesus is, and the crowd asked what to do. In none of these does the demand come first.

And what Peter answers

Verse 38: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Verse 39 widens it: the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.

Notice what the answer is not. It is not "keep an open mind," not "come to a class," and not "accept Jesus into your heart." It is a concrete, sacramental, communal next step with a name on it.

And verse 40 says he kept going: he testified with many other words and exhorted them. Luke says Peter urged. Luke says he testified at length and urged them directly.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Three quotations doing three different jobs

Joel 2:28-32 explains the phenomenon in front of them. Psalm 16:8-11 supplies the argument for the Resurrection. Psalm 110:1 establishes the exaltation. Tonight's live discovery has the group work out what each quotation is for, so read them yourself first and do not preview it.

Pentecost as a feast

Pentecost is the Greek name for the Feast of Weeks, fifty days after Passover, a harvest festival (Leviticus 23:15-21; Deuteronomy 16:9-12). Later Jewish tradition associates it with the giving of the Law at Sinai. Whether that

association was already current in the first century is debated among scholars, so if you raise it, raise it as a possibility rather than as background fact.

Three thousand

Exodus 32:28 reports that about three thousand fell after the golden calf. Acts 2:41 reports that about three thousand were added. Readers have noticed the inversion for a very long time. St. Luke does not comment on it, and whether he intends it is genuinely debated. Offer it as something to notice, not as something the text asserts.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Paul II on proposing without imposing

St. John Paul II wrote that the Church proposes and imposes nothing, that she respects persons and cultures, and that she honors the sanctuary of conscience.

Read the sentence in both directions before you use it. It forbids coercion, manipulation, and improper inducement, while leaving respectful persuasion entirely intact. It also assumes that a proposal is actually made. Refusing to propose anything is not reverence for another person's conscience; it leaves the conscience with nothing to work on.

St. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio 39 (1990).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Cyril of Jerusalem on what happens in the water

Instructing candidates preparing for Baptism, St. Cyril of Jerusalem teaches in substance that what takes place in the font is not a symbol standing in for something absent, but a real death and a real birth, and that the water and the Spirit belong together and are not to be separated.

This is why Peter's answer in verse 38 is not a formality tacked onto a conversion that had already happened. The answer to "what shall we do" is a sacrament.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, summarized from his catechetical instructions to those preparing for Baptism. A faithful summary of his teaching, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Francis on the content of the first announcement

Pope Francis wrote that the Church has rediscovered the central place of the first announcement, and gave its content in a single line: Jesus Christ loves you, he gave his life to save you, and he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen, and free you.

He adds that this announcement is not one stage among others that we graduate from. It is the first in a qualitative sense, and it has to be heard again and again through every stage of catechesis. Nobody has outgrown it, however long they have been at this.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium 164 (2013).

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Church's own account of what the first proclamation contains, and what it asks for, lives in these paragraphs.

- **CCC 731.** At Pentecost, Christ's Passover is fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- **CCC 1226.** From the day of Pentecost the Church has celebrated and administered Baptism, and the Catechism quotes Acts 2:38 as it does so.
- **CCC 1427.** Jesus calls to conversion, and this call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom; in the Church's preaching it is addressed first to those who do not yet know Christ.
- **CCC 597.** No collective guilt for the death of Jesus may be laid on the Jews of Jerusalem as a whole, still less on Jews of other times and places.
- **CCC 598.** The Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the heaviest responsibility for the torments inflicted on Jesus, because our sins are involved. Have this ready.
- **CCC 599-600.** The death of Jesus was not the result of chance, but belongs to the mystery of God's plan, and God's eternal plan includes each person's free response to grace.
- Applying this sermon to a conversation over a kitchen table is our extension of these paragraphs, not their wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Fully visible tonight, and worth savoring silently: the man preaching this sermon denied Jesus three times seven weeks earlier. Do not point it out. Someone will.

Thread B, "Whose work is this?" Two developments. Verse 37, where they *were cut* to the heart, which is passive. And verse 39, "everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." Someone may bring it up. Agree in one sentence, say the question is coming back, and move. Session 8 presses it and Session 9 resolves it. Do not spend it tonight.

Thread C, "The room you are afraid of." Peter is standing in the city where Jesus was executed weeks earlier, addressing the crowd corporately in the second person. Do not claim these particular hearers were present at the execution; Luke does not say so. Note it and move on.

Sealed sheet. Two sessions out. Do not mention it. If someone asks, say only that it is coming.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group discover, by counting, that the sermon is mostly proclamation of events interpreted through Scripture, and that no command about how to respond arrives before verse 38.
2. Land verse 37: the crowd asked first. The demand emerged from them, and this is now the third time in the study they have seen that order.
3. Have them see that Peter argues from what his hearers already grant, and compare his toolkit directly with Paul's at Athens.
4. Establish that the answer to "what shall we do" is concrete and sacramental: repent and be baptized.
5. Work the objection that "the ask" is a Protestant altar call, and land the Catholic version of making a proposal.
6. Move the ladder across its hinge: from listening to speaking. One true sentence, said out loud, to one real person.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Field report on rung six, the one sentence written down.
0:12-0:20	Win questions.
0:20-0:28	Read Acts 2:14-41 aloud in full.
0:28-0:40	Build 1 and 2, what kind of statements these are, and the two things in verse 23.
0:40-0:48	Build 3, the argument from David.
0:48-0:58	Live discovery: what each of the three quotations is for.
0:58-1:04	Build 4, the comparison with Athens.
1:04-1:14	Build 5 and 6, verse 36, and who asks first.
1:14-1:20	Build 7, what Peter actually answers.
1:20-1:26	Build 8, the build-then-press on the ask.
1:26-1:30	Send questions, Live It This Week, take-homes, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Read only verses 22 to 41 aloud and summarize the Joel section. Saves six minutes, though it weakens the discovery.
- Drop Build 3 and let the live discovery carry the argument from David. Saves eight minutes.
- Cut Build 4 (the Athens comparison) and hold it for a later leader-led conversation. Saves six minutes, and it is a shame, because it is the cleanest cross-session payoff in the study so far.
- Do not cut Build 6 or Build 8.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

Verse 23 and verse 36 will land hard on a modern room. If anyone hears an accusation against the Jewish people, stop immediately and read CCC 597 and then CCC 598 aloud, in that order. The second one is the point: the Church turns the charge toward Christians.

If someone is upset by "God's definite plan" and hears determinism, do not solve it. Say the Church holds both, that CCC 600 says God's plan includes each person's free response, and that the study is about to spend two whole sessions on exactly this. That is true, and it will hold them.

If someone has never been baptized and this session raises it, notice, say nothing in the room, and follow up in the week. Know your parish's OCIA contact before you walk in tonight. This is the session most likely to surface it.

If the room decides that making an ask is pushy, do not argue in the abstract. Ask them what Peter said in

verse 38 and whether it sounds pushy in context. The text is a better advocate than you are.

Discussion Guide

Cut to the Heart

Acts 2:14-41

OPENING PRAYER

Lord God, on the day you poured out your Spirit, the first thing your Church did was talk about your Son. Give us that instinct. Loosen our tongues, order our words, and let the people we love hear something that is actually about Jesus rather than about us. And when they ask what they should do, give us the courage to tell them plainly. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Five minutes. Two or three people.

Last week you wrote one sentence beginning "One thing I know," and practiced saying it aloud alone. Not the sentence itself: how did it feel to say it out loud in an empty room?

Leader: do not ask anyone to read their sentence. Some will offer. Receive it without evaluating it, and do not improve anybody's wording.

WIN

- ▶ When did somebody last ask you a direct question about your faith? What did they ask?
- ▶ What is the last thing that cut you to the heart? Not annoyed you. Went in.

BUILD

Read Acts 2:14-41 aloud in full. It is long, so give it to a strong reader. Ask the group to listen for one thing on this pass: how much of it is Peter reporting something that happened, and how much is him telling the crowd to do something.

1. Look at verses 22 to 24, the first thing Peter says about Jesus. What kind of statements are these? Now scan forward: where is the first thing he tells the crowd to do?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They are reports. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works, which you yourselves know about. This Jesus you crucified. God raised him up.

The first command about how to respond is verse 38. He does tell them to listen at verses 14 and 22, and to know assuredly at verse 36, so the claim is not that there are no imperatives; it is that nothing before verse

38 asks them to do anything about it. And verse 40 shows he kept going afterward, so verse 38 is not the last word either.

Say this plainly, because most Catholics assume evangelizing means explaining what somebody ought to change. The first Christian sermon is above all an announcement of events, interpreted through Scripture and argued as a case. Something happened, and here is what it was and what it means.

2. Verse 23 says two things in one sentence. What are they, and what does Peter do with the tension between them?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

That Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, and that they crucified and killed him by the hands of lawless men. God's plan and real human responsibility, in one breath. Handle the second half exactly as CCC 597 does: it is a corporate accusation, and the personal guilt of individuals is known to God alone.

And he does nothing with the tension. He does not say they were only instruments and therefore innocent, and he does not suggest the crucifixion caught God off guard. Both stand.

Read this to the room. The Catechism holds the same two things. CCC 599 and 600 place the death of Jesus inside God's plan, and say God's eternal plan includes each person's free response to grace. CCC 597 forbids laying collective guilt on the Jewish people, then or now. And CCC 598 turns it toward us: the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the heaviest responsibility, because our sins are involved. Peter said "you." The Church says "we."

3. Verses 25 to 32. Peter is not just asserting the Resurrection, he is arguing for it. Reconstruct the argument. What are the premises?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Premise one: David was a prophet, and knew God had sworn to set one of his descendants on his throne (vv30-31). Premise two: David wrote that God would not let his Holy One see corruption (Psalm 16). Premise three: David died, was buried, and his tomb is a fact Peter can invoke as publicly known. Conclusion: he was not talking about himself, so he was talking about the Christ.

The premises are things his audience already holds: David's prophetic status, a text they revere, and a tomb Peter can invoke as publicly known. And he adds a fourth kind of support at verse 32, apostolic eyewitness testimony.

Then verse 32 adds the second leg: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses." Scripture plus eyewitness. Peter uses both, and neither on its own.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Send them into the text rather than telling them.

Have three people find and read aloud the three passages Peter quotes: Joel 2:28-32, then Psalm 16:8-11, then Psalm 110:1.

Then ask the group to work out, for each one, what job it is doing in the sermon. Give them a few minutes.

What they should find: Joel explains the strange thing happening in front of them, so the crowd is not left thinking these men are drunk. Psalm 16 supplies the argument for the Resurrection. Psalm 110 establishes that Jesus is now exalted and reigning, which is what makes verse 36 possible.

Then have someone estimate the proportion. Roughly a third of this sermon is Old Testament quotation, and none of it is decoration. Every quotation is load bearing.

4. Now compare with Session 5. Peter quotes the Old Testament constantly. Paul at the Areopagus quoted none of it and quoted Greek poets instead. Why the difference, and what does it settle?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The audience. Peter is speaking to devout Jews from every nation gathered for a pilgrim feast, who accept the Scriptures as authoritative. Paul is speaking to Stoics and Epicureans, and does not presume they hold Israel's Scriptures as authoritative.

Same Gospel. Same Resurrection. Same call to repentance. Two completely different toolkits, chosen by who is in the room.

What it settles is the question somebody raised back in Session 3 or 5: starting where people actually stand is not a modern accommodation. It is apostolic practice, and the New Testament preserves both versions side by side so we cannot miss it.

5. Verse 36 is the conclusion of the whole sermon. What exactly is the claim?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Two titles and one identification. The one you executed is the one God has installed as Lord and Messiah. It is a statement about who is currently in charge of the world.

Ask the group what that sentence would cost Peter if it were false, and what it demands of the hearer if it is true. There is no third option available in it, which is the point.

6. Verse 37. What happens to the crowd, and who speaks next?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They were cut to the heart. The verb carries the sense of being pierced, and describes profound distress. It does not exclude intellectual conviction; it tells you where the conviction landed.

And **they** speak next: "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter did not tell them what to do. They asked.

Point at the pattern, because this is the third time. In Session 1, Philip made his claim and then said come and see. In Session 4, the Samaritan woman asked for the water before Jesus named her life. Here the crowd asks before Peter instructs. In none of these does the demand come first.

Then ask the honest question: if we told people who Jesus is more often, how many of these questions would

we not have to manufacture?

7. Verses 38 to 40. What is Peter's answer, and what is it not?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then he widens it: the promise is to you and your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.

What it is not: it is not "keep an open mind," not "come to a class," not "make a decision in your heart." It is a concrete, sacramental, communal next step with a name on it, and it is addressed to every one of them individually.

And verse 40 says he kept going, testifying with many other words and exhorting them. Luke uses a word that means urging. He testified at length and urged them directly.

8. Someone says: this "ask" business is a Protestant altar call. Making people decide is manipulation, and Catholic conversion is gradual and sacramental. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. The objection protects something real and then draws the wrong conclusion from it.

DIG DEEPER

Three thousand. Exodus 32:28 reports about three thousand fell after the golden calf, and Acts 2:41 reports about three thousand were added. Readers have noticed the inversion for centuries. St. Luke does not comment on it, and whether he intends it is debated. Notice it; do not build on it.

Pentecost as a feast. Pentecost is the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:15-21), fifty days after Passover. Later Jewish tradition links it to the giving of the Law at Sinai. Whether that link was already current in the first century is debated, so offer it as a possibility rather than as background fact.

Save yourselves. In verse 40 the Greek behind "save yourselves from this crooked generation" is passive in form: be saved. Even the imperative is not finally something they do to themselves.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it at full strength, because the person raising it has usually watched the failure mode up close.

Start by granting the strongest version, which is not a caricature: a public, non-coercive invitation to repent and believe, ordinarily followed by baptism and by real discipleship, is a serious and defensible practice, and many people have come to Christ through one. What the objection is really aimed at is the manipulative version of it. Emotional pressure produces decisions that evaporate. Anyone who has worked with young people has met the person who went forward at a retreat, wept, meant it entirely, and was gone in six

weeks. Manufacturing a moment is not the same as making a disciple.

The Church herself warns against this. St. John Paul II wrote that the Church proposes and imposes nothing, and honors the sanctuary of conscience. Pressure applied to a conscience is a real injury, not a technique.

And the ordinary preparation of adult catechumens genuinely is staged by design: the catechumenate takes months by intention. Catholic teaching recognises both an initial conversion and a lifelong one, and it also knows sudden conversions and immediate baptism in some circumstances, so the objection should not be pushed into a claim that gradualness is universal.

On top of that, the demand for a decision often serves the asker. It resolves our anxiety, gives us something to report, and turns another person's eternal life into our result.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First: read verse 37 again before you attribute a technique to Peter. He did not stage the moment or work the crowd toward a decision. He told them who Jesus is, and **they** asked what to do. The objection is aimed at a method this passage does not use.

Second: look at what he does once they ask. He does not say keep thinking about it. He says repent, be baptized, every one of you, and receive the Holy Spirit. He gives them a specific next step with a name on it. Refusing to answer that question when someone asks it is not delicacy. It is leaving them standing in the doorway.

Third: verse 40 says he exhorted them, with many other words. He urged. Whatever "proposing rather than imposing" means, it evidently includes urging, because the Apostle does it in the same paragraph.

Fourth: run *Redemptoris Missio* 39 in both directions. The Church proposes, which rules out coercion of assent, though it does not touch her teaching authority or her legitimate discipline. The Church **proposes**, which means something is actually offered. A conscience needs material to work on, and withholding the proposal in the name of respecting conscience gives it nothing to respect.

So the Catholic version of the ask is not an altar call. It is telling somebody the true next step: come to Mass with me, this is what Confession is and here is when it is, let me introduce you to the person who runs OCIA, have you ever been baptized. Concrete, sacramental, and unhurried, and almost none of us ever say any of it.

Give the objector the last word on one point. Making a person into a project, and applying pressure to close them, are real sins against them. This study has said so since Session 1 and will say it again in Session 9. The correction to pressure is not silence. It is a proposal made by someone who will still be there if the answer is no.

SEND

- ▶ If somebody you love asked you tonight, "what shall I do," what would you actually say? Say it out loud now, in one sentence.
- ▶ Which is your failure mode: never making a proposal, or making it as a demand?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 7 of the ladder. The hinge of the whole ladder. Six weeks of listening, and now you say one sentence out loud to another human being.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Say your "one thing I know" sentence out loud to one of the three, this week. One sentence. Not the Gospel, not an argument, not an invitation yet.
- Do not build up to it and do not explain it afterward. Say it, and then let the silence be theirs.
- If they ask a question, answer honestly, including "I do not know" where that is the honest answer.
- If the moment does not come, do not manufacture one. Bring that back next week; it is a real report and there are six sessions left.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you are Lord and Christ, and nothing about that depends on whether we say it well. Give us Peter's nerve and Peter's content. Keep us from making people into projects, and keep us from a silence we have dressed up as respect. And when someone asks us what they should do, do not let us change the subject. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?"

Acts 2:37

SESSION 7 | PART THREE

Leader Reference Card

Cut to the Heart

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

Passage	Where and why
Acts 2:14-41	Primary text, read aloud in full.
Joel 2:28-32	Live discovery. Quoted at Acts 2:17-21 to explain the phenomenon.
Psalm 16:8-11	Live discovery and Build 3. Quoted at Acts 2:25-28 as the argument for the Resurrection.
Psalm 110:1	Live discovery. Quoted at Acts 2:34-35 to establish the exaltation.
Acts 17:22-31	Build 4. Paul at Athens, for the toolkit comparison.
Leviticus 23:15-21	Dig Deeper. The Feast of Weeks.
Deuteronomy 16:9-12	Old Testament Roots. The Feast of Weeks.
Exodus 32:28	Dig Deeper. About three thousand fell after the golden calf.
John 1:41-46	Build 6. Philip's claim followed by his invitation, from Session 1.
John 4:15-16	Build 6. She asked before he named it, from Session 4.

Leader Preparation Guide

Brother Saul

Movement Three: The Proposal and Surrender · Acts 9:1-22

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover that in the conversion of the Church's greatest evangelist, the human being involved contributed nothing but a frightened errand, that God was working both ends of the encounter before either party knew about the other, and that the risen Christ, having appeared in person, gave one instruction and deliberately left the rest to be delivered by a man.

Catholic Touchstone

The primacy of grace. The very desire to turn toward God is already the work of grace, and God's free initiative asks for a free human response. Notice also that Christ does not hand Saul a private illumination. He hands him to a man, and through that man to the Church and a sacrament.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The state Saul is in

Verse 1: still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. Acts gives no indication that he was seeking Christ; it shows him hunting Christ's disciples. He is on a journey to arrest people, with letters in his bag. His interior state is not something the text discloses.

Say this early and let it sit. Any account of evangelization that makes prior openness or active searching a precondition has to explain Acts 9. The Church's greatest missionary was recruited off a road while actively hunting Christians. Note the limit: this rules out a precondition of receptivity, not the free response to grace that CCC 2002 requires.

What the voice actually says

Verse 4: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Not why do you persecute my followers, or my Church, or my teaching. Me.

Verse 5 makes it unmistakable: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Saul had never laid a hand on Jesus of Nazareth. He had arrested believers in Jerusalem and was travelling to Damascus with authority to arrest more, and the risen Christ counts that as an assault on himself.

This is the classic text behind what St. Augustine called the whole Christ, head and members together, and it is the ground under CCC 795. It is also, quietly, an evangelization point: the people you are praying for are not outside the range of Christ's personal attention.

What the risen Christ declines to do

Verse 6: "But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

Stop on that. He does give the immediate step: get up and go into the city. What he withholds is everything after that, and he withholds it so that a human being can deliver it.

This is the hinge of the session. At the exact moment when a human being was least necessary, Christ built one in.

Both ends, arranged in advance

Verses 11 and 12: the Lord tells Ananias that Saul is praying, and that Saul "has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him."

Saul was shown Ananias arriving before Ananias had agreed to go. Do not read that as making Ananias unnecessary. Read it as what it says: the obedience of a reluctant disciple was itself part of the arrangement.

The objection, and the answer that is not comforting

Verse 10: "Here I am, Lord." Instant readiness. Then verse 13, once he hears the name: "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem." He argues. He objects, and the objection is entirely reasonable.

And notice what God does not do. He does not minimize the danger and does not promise Ananias will be safe. He does explain, and the explanation is not comforting. Verse 15: "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

What he is given is that Saul belongs to God, that Saul will carry the name to Gentiles and kings and Israel, and that Saul is going to suffer for it. That is the whole of it, and it turns out to be enough.

The first word

Verse 17: "So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, Brother Saul."

Brother. To the man who came to arrest his friends, in the house where that man is sitting blind. Christ could have said it from the light. He chose to have a disciple say it in a house.

Then verse 18: something like scales fell from his eyes, he regained his sight, he rose and was baptized. Sight, and a sacrament. Acts phrases it passively, "he rose and was baptized", and does not name the minister; Ananias is the natural and traditional reading.

Where Ananias goes

Nowhere. He does not appear again in the narrative of Acts, and surfaces once more when Paul retells the story years later (Acts 22:12-16), where Paul is careful to describe him as a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews living in Damascus.

That is the pastoral payload of the session, and you should say it in plain words: almost nobody in your group is Paul. Most of them are Ananias, and Ananias walked to a house he did not want to enter, called the man brother, laid hands on him, and baptized him. Then he is gone from the book.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

People who argued with God about an assignment

This is tonight's live discovery, so do not spend it. The passages are Exodus 3:11-12, Judges 6:15-16, Isaiah 6:5-8, and Jeremiah 1:6-8. Read all four before the session and pay attention to what God says in reply each time.

Three days in the dark

Saul is blind for three days and neither eats nor drinks (verse 9), and then rises and is baptized. Jonah 1:17 and Hosea 6:2 give the three day pattern, and the New Testament uses it constantly. Offer it as a resonance the reader is meant to feel rather than a claim St. Luke makes.

Light that blinds before it heals

Isaiah 6:5 has the prophet undone by the vision before he is commissioned by it, and the coal touches his lips before he is sent. The pattern of being disabled by an encounter before being useful because of it is old.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine on the head and the members

St. Augustine teaches in substance that when the Lord asked Saul why he was persecuting him, no one had touched him in heaven; it was his body on earth that was being struck, and the head cried out for the members.

From this he draws the conclusion the Church has held ever since: Christ and his Church together make up the whole Christ, so that what is done to the least member is done to him. The Catechism states the same doctrine at CCC 795.

St. Augustine, summarized from his sermons and scriptural commentary. A faithful summary of a theme he returns to often, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Benedict XVI on what happened to Saul

In his catecheses on St. Paul, Pope Benedict XVI argued in substance that what took place on that road is badly described as a moral improvement. Saul was not a scoundrel who reformed; he was a serious, observant, zealous man who was overturned by a Person.

He pointed to how Paul himself describes it: not that he found Christ, but that Christ Jesus made him his own, took hold of him. Grace was not the reward for a search. It interrupted one that was headed the wrong way.

Pope Benedict XVI, summarized from his general audience catecheses on St. Paul (2008-2009); the scriptural anchor is Philippians 3:12.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | The Council of Trent on where any of this starts

Against the charge that Catholics believe we start the work of our own salvation, the Council of Trent taught in its decree on justification that the beginning of justification is derived from the prevenient grace of God through Jesus Christ, that is, from his call, by which people are called with no existing merits of their own.

Keep this in your pocket. It is the Church's formal statement of exactly what Acts 9 dramatizes: the movement begins on God's side, every time, and a person who is running the wrong way can be called anyway.

Council of Trent, Decree on Justification, Session 6 (1547). Document-level citation; no chapter number given.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

This session sits on the Church's teaching about grace, which is more precise and more generous than most people in your room expect.

- **CCC 795.** Christ and his Church together make up the whole Christ. This is the doctrine behind "why do you persecute me."
- **CCC 153.** Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him. Argument alone cannot produce supernatural faith, though reasons, preaching and human witness genuinely serve grace.
- **CCC 1996.** Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help God gives us to respond to his call.
- **CCC 2001.** The preparation of a person for grace is already the work of grace. Even the wanting is given.
- **CCC 2002.** God's free initiative demands a free human response. The Catechism says demands, and the response is genuinely ours.
- Applying CCC 2001 to the person on your list who seems furthest away is our extension of the paragraph, not its wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Inverted tonight in the most extreme form in the study: Saul meets Christ before he meets the Church, and is immediately handed to the Church anyway. Do not comment.

Thread B, "Whose work is this?" Tonight you press it hard and you do not resolve it. That is the whole assignment. Build 8 is designed to leave the room genuinely unsettled. If someone tries to tie it off with either "it is all God" or "God needs us," let the other half of the room push back and then say honestly that the question is not finished, and that next week is where the study answers it. Resist your instinct to be helpful here. The unresolved night is what makes Session 9 land.

Thread C, "The room you are afraid of." This is the thread's resolution in practice. Ananias names his fear out loud to God, is not reassured, and goes anyway. Everything the study has said about the room you dread comes to rest on verse 17.

Sealed sheet. Next session. Remind the group at the very end to bring their Take-Home 1 sealed page next week, still sealed. Do not say what it is for.

SESSION GOALS

1. Establish from verses 1 and 2 that Saul was not open, not searching, and not at a low point, and let that dismantle any theory that requires prior openness or searching.
2. Have the group notice that the risen Christ, appearing in person, declined to say what Saul should do and sent him to a man instead.
3. Track Ananias precisely: readiness, then a named fear, then an answer that does not comfort him, then obedience.
4. Land verse 17 on the whole room. The first word the Church says to its persecutor is "Brother," and a layman says it.

5. Have the group find the objection-and-answer pattern across four Old Testament call narratives, and see what God consistently does and does not say.
6. Press Thread B without resolving it, and send everybody home with the one small errand they have been avoiding.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:14	Field report on rung seven, the sentence said out loud. Give this one extra time; it was the hinge rung.
0:14-0:20	Win questions.
0:20-0:26	Read Acts 9:1-22 aloud.
0:26-0:38	Build 1 to 3, Saul's condition, what the voice says, and what Christ declines to do.
0:38-0:50	Build 4 and 5, Ananias's fear and the answer he gets.
0:50-1:00	Live discovery: four men who argued with God.
1:00-1:10	Build 6 and 7, the first word, the sacrament, and where Ananias goes afterward.
1:10-1:22	Build 8, the build-then-press. Do not resolve it.
1:22-1:30	Send questions, Live It This Week, take-homes, reminder to bring the sealed page, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Drop Build 2 and summarize "why do you persecute me" yourself in a minute. Saves eight minutes, and CCC 795 can go on the take-home.
- Run the live discovery with Exodus 3 and Jeremiah 1 only. Saves five minutes and keeps the pattern visible.
- Cut Build 7 and fold "where does Ananias go" into Build 6 as a single sentence. Saves six minutes.
- Do not cut Build 8, and do not cut the field report tonight.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

The temptation tonight is to resolve Thread B because the room is uncomfortable. Do not. Say plainly, if you need to, that the question is real, that the Church holds both sides, and that next week is built for it. Discomfort held for seven days is the mechanism.

If someone concludes that evangelization is pointless because God does it all, do not argue them out of it in the moment. Ask them to hold the position for a week and write down what they think Ananias contributed. Then move on.

If someone in your group has been the target of religious pressure and hears "Brother Saul" as cheap, take it seriously. Note that Ananias had every reason to withhold the word and had to be sent twice before he said it.

Somebody in the room is Ananias right now, with a specific person they are afraid of. Do not draw them out publicly. The practice this week is designed to find them.

Discussion Guide

Brother Saul

Acts 9:1-22

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you met a man on a road who was hunting your friends, and you called him yours. And then you sent someone who was frightened of him to say so. Give us Ananias's obedience, which is the only part of this story we are ever asked for. And where we are afraid, let us say so plainly to you and then go anyway. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Eight minutes tonight, not five. This was the hinge rung and the room needs to hear from more than two people.

Last week you said one true sentence out loud to another person. What happened? And if it did not happen, say that too.

Leader: the reports where nothing happened matter most tonight. Receive them without a trace of disappointment, and do not let the group coach anyone.

WIN

- ▶ Who is someone you were certain would never change, who did?
- ▶ When has God asked you for something small that you did not want to do? What made it hard?

BUILD

Read Acts 9:1-22 aloud. On this pass ask the group to keep one eye on Ananias, who is easy to read past and is the reason this session is in the study.

1. Verses 1 and 2. Describe Saul's spiritual condition. Is he seeking?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He is still breathing threats and murder against the disciples. He is not seeking, not curious, not open, and not at rock bottom. He is on a business trip, with warrants, to arrest people and bring them back bound.

Now say the consequence out loud. Any theory of evangelization that requires openness as a precondition has to explain this chapter. The greatest missionary in the Church's history was recruited off a road while actively hunting Christians.

Ask the group who on their list they have quietly written off as too far gone, and let the question sit without being answered.

2. Verse 4. What exactly does the voice say? Read it slowly and notice the pronoun.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute **me**?" Not my followers, not my Church, not my teaching. Me. And verse 5 removes any doubt: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Saul had never touched Jesus of Nazareth. He had arrested believers in Jerusalem and was on the road to arrest more, and the risen Christ counts that as an assault on his own person.

This is the text behind what St. Augustine called the whole Christ, head and members together, which the Church teaches at CCC 795. And notice the quiet consequence for tonight: the people on your list are not outside the range of Christ's personal attention. He is already involved.

3. Verse 6. The risen Christ has Saul face down on the road. What does he tell him, and what does he withhold?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"Rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." He gives the immediate step and withholds the rest, so that a man will have to bring it.

Sit on how strange that is. The risen Lord of glory has appeared in person, in light, and he does not finish the conversation himself. He gives one instruction, and sends a blind man into a city to wait for the rest from a disciple.

This is the hinge of the session. At the exact moment when a human being was least necessary, Christ built one in. Whatever else that means, it is not an accident and it is not efficiency.

4. Verses 10 to 14. Track Ananias's response in order. What does he say first, and what does he say second?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

First: "Here I am, Lord." Immediate, unqualified readiness, the classic answer of every prophet in Scripture.

Then he hears the name, and he argues: "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem, and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name."

He objects, out loud, to God, and the objection is entirely reasonable. Acts records what he said rather than what he felt; fear is the natural reading. Notice that Scripture records the objection rather than editing it out. The saints in this book are allowed to be frightened in writing.

5. Verses 15 and 16. How does God answer the fear? Make a list of what he says, and then a list of what he does not say.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

What he says: go, this man is a chosen instrument of mine, he will carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel, and I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

What he does not say: that Ananias will be safe. That the danger is exaggerated. That he understands how hard this is. That it will go well. Note that he does explain himself, at verses 15 and 16; the explanation simply is not reassurance.

The entire reassurance is that Saul belongs to God, and that Saul is going to suffer. That is all Ananias gets, and it is enough to get him out the door. Ask the group whether they would have gone on that.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Do not tell them the pattern. Assign the passages.

Four readers. Exodus 3:11-12, then Judges 6:15-16, then Isaiah 6:5-8, then Jeremiah 1:6-8.

Then two questions, in this order. First: what does each man say when he is sent? Second, and this is the one: what does God say back?

What they should find: Moses says who am I, Gideon says my clan is the weakest and I am the least, Jeremiah says I do not know how to speak, I am only a youth. Isaiah is a different case and worth naming as such: he cries out that he is a man of unclean lips before any commission is issued, is purified by the coal, and then volunteers. The objections in the first three are about competence and worthiness; Isaiah's is confession, and it comes first.

And notice what God gives back. To Moses and to Gideon: "I will be with you." To Jeremiah both a direct correction, do not say you are only a youth, and the promise, I am with you to deliver you. To Isaiah, a coal from the altar for the mouth that had just called itself unclean, before any sending at all. Presence, in every case, and never a promise that it will be easy.

Then close the loop. Ananias stands in that line, and the answer he gets is the same kind of answer: not comfort, but the assurance that this belongs to God.

6. Verse 17. Ananias goes into the house. What is the first word out of his mouth?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"Brother." Brother Saul. To the man holding letters authorising him to arrest his friends, in the room where that man is sitting blind and hungry.

Christ could have said that word from the light on the road. He did not. A disciple said it, in a house, having been sent twice.

Ask the group to name the person they would find it hardest to say "brother" or "sister" to. Do not ask for the names.

7. Verses 18 and 19, and then look ahead. What happens to Saul, who does it, and where does Ananias appear in Acts after this?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Something like scales fell from his eyes, he regained his sight, he rose and was baptized, and then he ate and was strengthened. The sacrament comes through the Church, through a man, through a pair of hands. Note that Acts says only that he was baptized, without naming the minister; Ananias is the natural and traditional reading.

And Ananias does not appear again in the narrative of Acts. He surfaces once more when Paul retells the story years later (Acts 22:12-16), described as a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews living in Damascus.

Say the last part plainly. Almost nobody in this room is Paul. Most of us are Ananias, whose whole recorded part was to walk to a house he did not want to enter, call the man brother, lay hands on him, and baptize him. Then he is gone from the book. That was enough, and it is roughly the size of what is being asked of you.

8. Someone says: if conversion is entirely God's work, then this study is a well meant waste of thirteen weeks. Either Saul was going to be converted or he was not, and my conversations change nothing. Are they right?

Leader: work this fully, and then leave it open. Do not resolve it tonight, however uncomfortable the room gets. Next session is built for it.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below, and then stop. The answer is deliberately unfinished tonight.

DIG DEEPER

Did the men hear the voice? Acts 9:7 says they heard the voice but saw no one. Acts 22:9 says they saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one speaking. This is a real tension and a friend who reads critically will find it. The standard resolution turns on the Greek verb for hearing taking different cases, so that one text says they heard a sound and the other says they did not understand the speech. That resolution is old and widely held, and some scholars regard it as strained. Give your group both halves, including the honest admission that it is debated. Do not present a contested resolution as though it closed the matter.

Three days. Blind, and neither eating nor drinking, and then rising and being baptized. Jonah 1:17 and Hosea 6:2 supply the pattern. Feel the resonance; do not claim St. Luke asserts it.

Not a moral improvement. Pope Benedict XVI argued that Saul was not a scoundrel who reformed but a serious and observant man overturned by a Person, and pointed at how Paul himself puts it in Philippians 3:12: Christ Jesus made him his own.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build this properly, because tonight's text seems to be the objector's best evidence.

No human being evangelized Saul. The risen Christ appeared in person. Ananias does not arrive until after

the decisive event, and by then Saul is already praying and has already been told a man is coming.

St. Paul himself writes that it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God who has mercy (Romans 9:16). That is the same man, describing the same economy.

And the experience in this room supports it. Everybody here knows somebody they have prayed for and worked on for twenty years with nothing to show, and somebody else who came back out of nowhere with no human help at all. The pattern looks like it has nothing to do with us.

There is even a spiritual danger on the other side. People who believe they converted somebody are insufferable, and worse, they are unable to cope when the person falls away, because they have made another soul into their own achievement.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text, and notice that the pressing does not finish the argument.

First: verse 6. The risen Christ, in glory, on the road, declines to tell Saul what to do and sends him to wait for a man. If human involvement were dispensable, this is the one place in Scripture where it would obviously have been dispensed with, and it was not.

Second: verses 11 and 12. Saul is shown Ananias arriving before Ananias has agreed to come. That is not evidence that Ananias was surplus. It is evidence that his obedience was inside the plan rather than outside it.

Third: verse 17. The first word Saul hears from the Church is "Brother," and Christ gave that word to a frightened man to say rather than saying it himself.

Fourth: verse 18. Saul is baptized, on the natural reading by Ananias, though Acts phrases it passively. The grace comes through the Church, through hands, through a sacrament administered by somebody who did not want to be there.

Now stop. You have not settled the question and you should not pretend you have. The Church holds both sides: the preparation of a person for grace is already the work of grace (CCC 2001), and God's free initiative demands a free response (CCC 2002). Trent taught that the beginning of justification comes from prevenient grace, with no prior merits of ours.

Tell the group the truth: tonight we can see that we are not the principal cause and that we are not decoration, and we cannot yet say how both are true at once. Bring the discomfort back next week. Bring your sealed page too.

SEND

- ▶ What is the one small errand you have been avoiding? Not the conversation. The text, the visit, the invitation, the apology.
- ▶ God was not powerless without Ananias, and he truly willed to include him. Does that make Ananias's going matter less, or more? Sit with it rather than answering quickly.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 8 of the ladder. Do the errand. Ananias's whole contribution was walking to a house.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Name the one small concrete thing you have been avoiding with one of them. The message you have not sent, the visit you have not made, the apology you owe, the invitation you keep almost extending.
- Do it this week. Not a bigger version of it. That one.
- Before you go, say the fear out loud to God, in plain words, the way Ananias did. Do not tidy it up first.
- **Bring your sealed page from Take-Home 1 next week. Still sealed.**

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you told a frightened man to go to a house, and you did not tell him it would be safe. You told him only that the man inside was yours. Give us that much and let it be enough. Send us on the errand we have been avoiding, and let the first word we say be brother. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel."

Acts 9:15

Leader Reference Card

Brother Saul

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

Passage	Where and why
Acts 9:1-22	Primary text, read aloud in full.
Acts 22:6-16	Dig Deeper. Paul's own retelling, including the description of Ananias at verse 12.
Exodus 3:11-12	Live discovery. Moses: who am I, and the answer, I will be with you.
Judges 6:15-16	Live discovery. Gideon: my clan is the weakest, and the answer, I will be with you.
Isaiah 6:5-8	Live discovery. Isaiah: a man of unclean lips, and the coal from the altar.
Jeremiah 1:6-8	Live discovery. Jeremiah: I am only a youth, and the answer, I am with you to deliver you.
Romans 9:16	Build 8, the objection at full strength.
Philippians 3:12	Voices of the Church and Dig Deeper. Christ Jesus made me his own.
Jonah 1:17; Hosea 6:2	Old Testament Roots and Dig Deeper. The three day pattern.

He Looked at Him and Loved Him

Movement Three: The Proposal and Surrender · Mark 10:17-27; 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover what Jesus does when the answer is no: he tells the truth, he loves the man, he does not negotiate, and he lets him walk. Then discover from St. Paul what our actual job description is, in a passage that says we are nothing and that we are God's fellow workers within five verses of each other.

Catholic Touchstone

The act of faith is of its very nature free, and Christ invited people to faith and conversion but never coerced anyone. And God, who could accomplish everything alone, grants his creatures the dignity of being causes for one another. Tonight is where this study answers the question it has been carrying since Session 1.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This is the hinge session. Read the whole guide before you lead it.

Three things happen tonight: the study's central question gets answered, the sealed page opens, and the room meets the first outright failure in the New Testament material we have looked at. Plan your minutes and do not let the sealed page get squeezed into the last four.

Last week you deliberately left Thread B unresolved. Tonight you resolve it, and the resolution has to come out of the text rather than out of you.

The man himself

Verse 17: he runs up and kneels. Nobody makes him. He is eager, respectful, sincere, and he asks the best question in the Gospel: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

And in verse 20 he says he has kept the commandments from his youth, and nothing in the text suggests he is lying. Mark does not present him as a hypocrite or a fool. He presents him sympathetically, and records the man's own claim about the commandments without endorsing or disputing it.

That matters, because your group will want him to have been secretly insincere. He was not. St. Mark presents him sympathetically and gives us no reason to think he is lying, and he still said no.

"Why do you call me good?"

Verse 18 has been read several ways, and you should give the range honestly rather than pick a winner. The Church has always confessed the divinity of Christ, and has never read this verse as a denial of it.

One traditional patristic reading is that Jesus is pressing the man to follow his own words to their conclusion: if no one is good but God, and you have just called me good, then work out what you have said. A second reading

takes it as Jesus turning attention toward the Father, which he does throughout the Gospels. Both are available; neither is required.

What is not available is treating this as evidence that Jesus denied being God. If someone raises that, say so plainly and give the two readings above.

The sentence that carries the session

Verse 21: "And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

This is the only place in Mark where we are told that Jesus loved a particular individual. And the love and the demand are in the same sentence, with the love first.

It is worth saying to your group in exactly these terms: an extraordinarily radical and personal demand is made out of an affection Mark stops the narrative to report.

And then he lets him go

Verse 22: his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Now list what St. Mark does not report Jesus doing. St. Mark reports no calling after him, no softening of the terms, no smaller version, no following him down the road, no "think about it and come back".

The most important verb in this session is the one that is missing.

What he does instead, which is the answer to Thread B

Verses 23 to 27. He turns to the disciples and says how hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom. They are amazed, and then exceedingly astonished, and they say, "Then who can be saved?"

And Jesus looks at them and says: "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

That sentence lands immediately after a man walked away. Rather than closing the file, he turns to what God can do; he does not say the man is lost and he does not say the man will be fine. Signal the inference when you apply it: the passage invites us to put even such refusals inside our hope in God's power.

St. Paul finishes the job

1 Corinthians 3:5-9 gives your group the sentence they will carry out of this study. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."

And then, four verses later in the same argument: "He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers."

Both. We are nothing, and we are fellow workers, and our labor earns wages. St. Paul does not experience these as a contradiction and neither should we. The Catechism says the same thing in its own register at CCC 306: God, who could do it all alone, grants his creatures the dignity of being causes and principles for one another. And St. Augustine, quoted in the Catechism, puts it in one line: God created us without us, but he did not will to save us without us.

The sealed page

Participants sealed a page in week one with three names and one honest line: what they thought actually stopped them from speaking about Jesus. Tonight it opens.

It opens here on purpose. Session 6 already dealt with "I do not know enough." What is left, for most people, is the fear of the answer being no, and tonight is the session where a man says no to Jesus Christ himself and the sky does not fall.

Read the discussion guide section carefully. The rules are: they open it privately, they read only their own, and nobody is asked to share. Say all three rules out loud before anyone unfolds anything.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

A prophet sent to a mission that will not work

Tonight's live discovery is Isaiah 6:9-13, which is the passage immediately after the one your group read last week. Read it yourself first. It is harder than people expect and it is exactly what this session needs.

The watchman

Ezekiel 3:16-21. The watchman is held responsible for sounding the warning and is explicitly not held responsible for whether anyone listens. Verse 19: if you warn the wicked and he does not turn, you have saved your own life. Two different obligations, and most of us confuse them.

The word that does not come back empty

Isaiah 55:10-11. Rain and snow come down and do not return without watering the earth and giving seed to the sower; so is the word that goes out of God's mouth. Note what the passage does not promise: it does not say you will see the harvest, or that it will happen on your schedule.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | The Second Vatican Council on faith that cannot be forced

The Council taught that a person's response to God in faith must be free, that nobody is to be forced to embrace the faith against his will, and that the act of faith is by its very nature a free act.

And it grounded this not in modern sensibilities but in Christ's own conduct: he invited people to faith and conversion, and never coerced them; he bore witness to the truth and refused to impose it by force on those who spoke against it. The Catechism gathers all of this at CCC 160. Mark 10:22 is what that looks like in practice.

Second Vatican Council, Dignitatis Humanae 10 and 11 (1965), as gathered at CCC 160.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine on the one line that resolves tonight

God created us without us, St. Augustine said, but he did not will to save us without us.

That sentence is the answer to the question this study has been carrying since Session 1. Our existence required nothing from us. Our salvation is entirely initiated and enabled by grace, and it is not applied to us over our heads: even the free response it asks for is itself grace-assisted. The Catechism thought this important enough to quote it directly.

St. Augustine, Sermon 169, quoted at CCC 1847.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Monica, and a bishop who was tired of her

St. Augustine records in his Confessions that his mother pressed a bishop with her weeping and her requests that he argue with her son, until the bishop, a little displeased at her importunity, told her to go her way and said that it was not possible that the son of such tears should perish.

Augustine adds that she took those words as though they had sounded from heaven. He was not converted for years afterward. Note the timeline: she prayed, and wept, and waited, and it was a very long time, and she did not know when or how it would come.

St. Augustine, Confessions III.12.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

These paragraphs are the Church's answer to Thread B, and they are more satisfying than either half of it on its own.

- **CCC 306.** God is the sovereign master of his plan, and to carry it out he makes use of his creatures' cooperation. This is not a sign of weakness but of his greatness, because he grants his creatures the dignity of being causes and principles for each other.
- **CCC 307.** God gives human beings the power of freely sharing in his providence, entrusting them with real responsibility.
- **CCC 1847.** God created us without us, but he did not will to save us without us.
- **CCC 160.** The act of faith is of its very nature free, and Christ never coerced anyone.
- **CCC 1730.** God created us rational, with the dignity of a person who can initiate and control his own actions.
- **CCC 2002.** God's free initiative demands a free human response.
- Applying CCC 306 to the specific person on your list who has already said no is our extension of the paragraph, not its wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread B, "Whose work is this?" RESOLVES TONIGHT. The resolution has three parts and all three come from the texts: Mark 10:27, that what is impossible for men is possible with God, spoken directly after a refusal; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, that we are nothing and we are fellow workers whose labor earns wages; and CCC 306, that God grants his creatures the dignity of being causes for one another. Do not deliver this as a lecture. Get it out of the group in Build 6 and Build 7 and then say the Augustine line once.

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Quiet tonight. The rich man was invited to both, "come, follow me," and took neither.

Thread C, "The room you are afraid of." Resolved last week in Ananias. If it surfaces, tie it to the sealed page rather than reopening it.

Callback to Session 1. Judas was on the list of the Twelve, and this man knelt in the road. Nearness and eagerness are both real, and neither overrides freedom. If someone in the group makes the connection, let

them make it.

Sealed sheet opens tonight. Protect it. See the discussion guide.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group see that Mark presents this man as sincere and good, so that his refusal cannot be explained away.
2. Land verse 21: the love and the demand are in one sentence, and the love comes first.
3. Have the group list what Jesus does not do in verse 22, and feel the absence.
4. Resolve Thread B out of Mark 10:27 and 1 Corinthians 3:5-9, in the group's own words before it is in yours.
5. Read Isaiah 6:9-13 and let it stand without softening it.
6. Open the sealed page safely, with all three rules stated out loud first.
7. Send everyone home praying for someone who has already said no.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:04	Opening prayer. Keep it short tonight; the minutes are tight.
0:04-0:10	Field report on rung eight, the errand.
0:10-0:16	Win questions.
0:16-0:20	Read Mark 10:17-27 aloud.
0:20-0:32	Build 1 to 3, the man, the question about "good," and verse 21.
0:32-0:42	Build 4 and 5, the demand and what Jesus does not do.
0:42-0:52	Build 6, verses 23 to 27. Thread B begins to resolve here.
0:52-1:02	Build 7, 1 Corinthians 3:5-9. Read it aloud first. Thread B resolves.
1:02-1:10	Live discovery: Isaiah 6:9-13.
1:10-1:18	Build 8, the build-then-press on letting people go.
1:18-1:28	The sealed page. Ten minutes, protected. Do not let this get compressed.
1:28-1:30	Live It This Week, take-homes, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Cut Build 2 (the question about "good") entirely; handle it in one sentence orally if it comes up. Saves six minutes and costs the least tonight.
- Run the Isaiah discovery as a straight reading with one question. Saves five minutes.
- Shorten the field report to four minutes with two volunteers.

- **Do not cut Build 6, Build 7, or the sealed page.** If you are badly over, cut Build 8 and carry the objection into Session 10, where it also fits.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

Somebody in your room is carrying a child, a sibling, or a spouse who has walked away, and tonight is either the most consoling session of the study or the hardest. Watch for the person who goes very quiet during Build 5. Do not draw them out. Find them afterward.

If the room concludes that the rich man was damned, stop it. The text does not say what became of him, and the Church does not declare any particular person to be damned. Be precise about the asymmetry, because it matters: by canonization she does declare particular people to be in heaven, and she has never once declared anyone to be in hell. Then point at verses 23 to 27, which hold a grave warning about riches together with the hope that what is impossible for men is possible with God.

If someone weaponizes "God gives the growth" to justify never speaking again, take them back to 1 Corinthians 3:9 and to CCC 306. The same passage that says we are nothing says we are fellow workers whose labor is paid.

At the sealed page, if a person is visibly upset, let them keep it folded. Nobody has to open anything tonight. Say that as part of the instructions rather than as an exception granted afterward.

If someone's sealed line turns out to be about a specific painful relationship rather than a general fear, do not process it in the room. Acknowledge it in one sentence and follow up during the week.

Discussion Guide

He Looked at Him and Loved Him

Mark 10:17-27; 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you looked at a man who had done everything right, and you loved him, and you told him the truth, and you let him walk away. Give us the nerve to do all three. Free us from thinking we can save anybody, and free us from thinking that means we can stop. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Six minutes. Two or three people.

Last week you did the one small errand you had been avoiding. Did you?

Leader: if someone did not, do not let the group encourage them. Say that tonight's session is largely about exactly that, and move on.

WIN

- ▶ Think of someone you love who has said no to something you were sure was good for them. What did you do next?
- ▶ When has doing the right thing produced no visible result at all? How long did you keep doing it?

BUILD

Read Mark 10:17-27 aloud, all the way to verse 27. Do not stop at verse 22, even though that is where the story feels finished. The last five verses are why this session exists.

1. Verse 17, and then verse 20. Describe this man. Is he hostile? Is he insincere?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He runs, and he kneels. Nobody made him do either. He calls Jesus Good Teacher and asks what he must do to inherit eternal life, which is the best question anyone asks in this Gospel.

And in verse 20 he says he has kept the commandments from his youth, and nothing in the text suggests he is lying or self-deceived. St. Mark does not present him as a hypocrite, a fool, or a trap.

Push the group here, because they will want him to be secretly bad. St. Mark gives no hint of it. He presents the man sympathetically, and the man still said no. Note that Mark records his claim to have kept the commandments rather than certifying it, and that Jesus has just said something pointed about who is

good. If your account of why people refuse Christ requires them to be insincere, this man breaks it.

2. Verse 18. Jesus asks why the man calls him good. What is he doing, and what is he not doing?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Give the range honestly. One traditional reading among the Fathers is that Jesus is pressing the man to follow his own words to their conclusion: if no one is good but God alone, and you have just called me good, then work out what you have said. A second reading has Jesus turning attention toward the Father, which he does throughout the Gospels.

What he is not doing is denying that he is God. The Church has always confessed his divinity and has never read this verse as a denial. If someone raises it as one, say that plainly and offer the two readings above.

Both readings are available and neither is required. Say so rather than picking a winner for the group.

3. Verse 21. St. Mark tells us something about Jesus's interior state. What is it, and where does it sit in the sentence?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"And Jesus looking upon him loved him." It comes before the demand, in the same sentence as the demand.

This is the only place in St. Mark's Gospel where we are told Jesus loved a particular individual. Not the Twelve, not Peter, not the crowds. This man, who is about to refuse him.

Say it in these terms: an extraordinarily radical and personal demand is made out of an affection St. Mark stopped the story to report. Mark also records the universal demand to deny oneself and take up the cross, so avoid ranking this as the hardest thing he asks anyone. Love was not what he offered instead of the demand. It was what the demand was made of.

4. Verse 21 again. What does he actually ask for? And does he negotiate any part of it?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Sell what you have, give to the poor, and come follow me. He names one thing lacking and then asks for everything.

And there is no negotiation, no staged plan, no percentage, and no probationary period. He does not say "start with a tithe." He does not say "keep the house."

Ask the group how they would have handled this conversation. Most of us would have found a smaller ask. Then ask what a smaller ask would have given the man.

5. Verse 22. The man leaves. Now make a list: what does St. Mark not report Jesus doing?

Give the group a minute to build the list before anyone speaks. The absence is the lesson, and lists make absences visible.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

St. Mark reports none of it: no calling after him, no softening of the terms, no smaller version offered, no following him down the road, no "take some time and come back", no disciple sent after him, no explanation to the crowd. What we have is the account's silence, and it is deafening.

The most important verb in this session is the one that is missing.

And notice that Jesus, who could see the man's heart, and who loved him, and who was right, still let him walk. If anyone ever had the standing to override another person's freedom, it was him, in that moment, and he did not.

Sit in the silence for a beat before moving on. Do not rescue the room. The next question is the rescue.

6. Verses 23 to 27. What does Jesus say next, and what is he doing with what just happened?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He turns to the disciples and says how hard it is for those with riches to enter the kingdom. They are amazed, then exceedingly astonished, and they ask, "Then who can be saved?"

And Jesus looks at them and says: "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

Notice when he says it. Immediately after a refusal. He does not treat the man's departure as the end of the matter and he does not pronounce him lost. He turns to what God can do. Signal the inference when you apply it: the passage invites us to put even such refusals inside our hope in God's power.

Ask the group directly: is that a comfort or a dodge? Then let them argue about it for a minute, because the next question is where it gets settled.

7. Now read 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 aloud. Find two statements in these five verses that look like they contradict each other.

This is the question the whole study has been building toward. Give it real time.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

First: "neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (v7).

Second: "we are God's fellow workers" (v9), and in between, "each shall receive his wages according to his labor" (v8).

Neither the planter nor the waterer is what produces the growth. And they are God's fellow workers, and each will receive wages according to his labour. St. Paul puts all three in one paragraph and shows no sign of noticing a problem. Note that verse 7 is a comparison with the God who gives growth, not a statement that we are nothing in ourselves.

Here is the answer to the question this study has been carrying since the first night. You are not the principal cause, and you are not decoration. The Catechism calls creatures genuine secondary causes, which is exactly the standing you have here. Those are not in tension once you see that your working is itself something God is doing, and that he arranged it that way on purpose rather than out of need.

The Catechism says it at CCC 306: God, who could accomplish everything alone, gives his creatures the dignity of being causes and principles for one another. And St. Augustine says it in one line, which the Catechism quotes at CCC 1847: God created us without us, but he did not will to save us without us.

Say the Augustine line once, slowly, and then stop talking.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Do not preview this. It is harder than the group expects.

Remind them what they read last week: Isaiah 6:5-8, ending at "Here am I! Send me."

Now have someone read Isaiah 6:9-13, which is what comes next.

Then ask: what is Isaiah being sent to do?

What they should find: he is sent to a people who will hear and not understand, see and not perceive, and he is commissioned knowing it. Do not reduce this to a mission that fails; the passage speaks of judicial hardening, of devastation, and of a surviving holy seed. And when he asks "How long, O Lord?" the answer is not encouraging: until the cities lie waste and the land is desolate.

Then read the very last clause aloud yourself: "The holy seed is its stump." After all of it, a stump, and in the stump a seed. Ask the group what that does to their definition of a successful ministry, and let the answers be slow.

8. Someone says: if God gives the growth, then persistence is presumption. Jesus let him go, and so should we. Praying for the same person for twenty years is not faith, it is refusing to accept an answer. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. The objection is protecting something real, and it draws the wrong line.

DIG DEEPER

What became of him? The text does not say, and St. Mark never mentions him again. The Church has never declared any particular person to be in hell; note the asymmetry, since by canonization she does declare particular people to be in heaven. Either way, we are not in a position to pronounce on this man. The passage gives no verdict on his final fate. What it gives is a grave warning about riches and a word of hope in God's power.

A callback to Session 1. Judas was on the list of the Twelve, and this man knelt in the road. One had every advantage of nearness and the other had every advantage of eagerness. Neither overrode freedom, and neither is presented as a failure of Christ's.

"Sell what you have." The Church has never read this as binding on every Christian in the same form, and has read it as a call to a specific man and, in the tradition of the evangelical counsels, as a genuine vocation for some. What is binding on everyone is that nothing may be held back from Christ. If the group wants to argue about this, note the distinction and move on; it is a different session.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it at full strength. The person raising this has usually been on the receiving end of the alternative.

Jesus let him go, with no follow up recorded, and he is the one person in history who would have been right to chase.

Religious pursuit destroys families. Every person in this room can name a household where the faith became a weapon, where holidays became ambushes, and where an adult child eventually stopped answering the phone. The pursuing was done out of love and it did real damage.

And 1 Corinthians 3 seems to be on the objector's side. If God gives the growth, the anxious over-functioning of the evangelist starts to look like a failure of trust rather than an excess of zeal.

There is also a hard question underneath: at what point does continuing to pray for someone's conversion become a refusal to accept them as they are?

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First: read past verse 22. Jesus does not shrug and change the subject. He turns to the disciples and says that what is impossible for men is possible with God. He treats the refusal as an occasion for hope in God rather than as a closed file. Letting someone go is not the same as writing them off, and the difference usually shows up in whether you are still praying.

Second: 1 Corinthians 3:9. The same five verses that say we are nothing say we are God's fellow workers, and verse 8 says each will be paid according to his labor. If the growth being God's made our labor pointless, St. Paul would not have mentioned wages.

Third: Ezekiel 3:16-21. The watchman is responsible for sounding the warning and explicitly not responsible for whether anyone listens. Those are two different obligations, and most of the exhaustion in this room comes from confusing them. The watchman is accountable for the warning and not for the outcome. Read it as the illuminating analogy it is: the duty of the baptized to bear witness rests on CCC 900 and 1816, and it does not require repeated confrontation of any one person.

Fourth: Isaiah 6:9-13, which you just read. A prophet was sent knowing in advance that the people would hear without understanding, and he was not thereby excused from going.

Fifth: St. Monica prayed for years without knowing when or how it would come. Nobody told her the ending in advance, and if she had accepted the first answer she got, the Church would be without the *Confessions*.

And give the objector their due, because they have earned it. Coercion and manipulative pressure can be sinful; nagging and treating a person as a project are at the least a failure of charity and prudence, and this study has said so since Session 1. The correction is not to stop praying. It is to stop pushing, and to stay.

SEND

- ▶ Who has already said no to you? Not a stranger. Someone who knows exactly what you believe and has decided.
- ▶ What would change this week if you truly believed you were not the cause and also not optional?

THE SEALED PAGE

OPEN THE SEALED PAGE | privately, and nobody has to read theirs aloud

Leader: say all three rules out loud before anyone unfolds anything. One, you open your own page and read only your own. Two, nobody will be asked to read theirs aloud. Three, if you would rather not open it at all tonight, do not; keep it folded and nobody will ask why.

Nine weeks ago you sealed a page with three names on it, and one honest line: what you thought actually stopped you from speaking about Jesus to those three.

Open it now. Read your own line, silently. Take a minute; there is no hurry.

Then the question, and it is the only one that matters tonight: were you right?

Underneath your original line, write what you now think the real answer is. Do not cross out the old one. Leave it where you can see it.

Then look at the three names. Are they the same three? Has anyone been added? Has anyone dropped off, and do you know why?

Leader guidance. Give this a full ten minutes and let a lot of it be silent. Then ask for volunteers only, with a question shaped like this: "Did anyone find that their guess was wrong?" Most people who guessed "I do not know enough" in week one will now write something closer to "I am afraid of what happens if they say no," and that is precisely why this page opens tonight and not in week six. Session 6 answered the first fear. Tonight answered the second one, because a man said no to Jesus Christ in front of us and the Gospel did not end.

Do not process anybody's specific relationship in the room. If something painful surfaces, receive it in one sentence and follow up during the week.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 9 of the ladder. Pray for the one who has already said no. This rung has no visible action in it at all, and that is the point of the session.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Add one more this week: someone who has already heard, already understood, and already declined.

Pray for them by name every day.

- Do not contact them about it. Not this week.
- Write your new sealed line somewhere you will see it. The real fear, now that you have named it.
- Once this week, say to God in plain words: I am not the cause, and I am not optional. Then go and do the small next thing anyway.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you looked at him and loved him and let him go, and then you turned around and said that with God all things are possible. Teach us to hold those two together. Take from us the burden of being anybody's savior,

and do not let us put down the work you have actually given us. We plant and we water. Give the growth in your own time, and let us not need to see it. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."

1 Corinthians 3:6

Leader Reference Card

He Looked at Him and Loved Him

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

Passage	Where and why
Mark 10:17-27	Primary text, read aloud through verse 27 rather than stopping at 22.
1 Corinthians 3:5-9	Build 7. Read aloud. The resolution of the study's central question.
Isaiah 6:5-8	Live discovery, the setup. Read last week in Session 8.
Isaiah 6:9-13	Live discovery. The commission to a mission that will not succeed, and the holy seed in the stump.
Ezekiel 3:16-21	Old Testament Roots and the press. The watchman, responsible for the warning and not the outcome.
Isaiah 55:10-11	Old Testament Roots. The word that does not return empty, with no promise that you will see it.
Mark 3:19	Dig Deeper. Judas on the list, from Session 1.
Mark 10:23-27	Build 6. With men it is impossible, but not with God.

Leader Preparation Guide

They Devoted Themselves

Movement Four: Formation · Acts 2:42-47

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover from six verses what St. Luke tells us about the life of the community that followed those conversions, and notice that the answer is four concrete communal practices rather than a program, that the sharing was costly and voluntary, and that the growth in verse 47 is credited to the Lord and not to the community.

Catholic Touchstone

You hand a person to Christ and to his Church, not to yourself. The four things they devoted themselves to in verse 42 are the skeleton of Catholic life, and the Catechism opens its treatment of the communion of saints by quoting this verse.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Four things, and the Greek is worth a minute

Verse 42: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

The apostles' teaching (*didachē tōn apostolōn*). Not their own reading, and not the teaching of whoever led them to Christ. There is an authoritative source, and it is not the person who evangelized them.

Fellowship (*koinōnia*). Not socializing. The word means a real sharing in common. Verses 44 and 45 give one concrete and costly expression of it, the selling of possessions, without exhausting what the word covers.

The breaking of the bread (*klasis tou artou*). Be precise here. The phrase can mean an ordinary meal, and honest commentators say so. Catholic tradition reads it Eucharistically, and it is the expression St. Luke uses at Luke 24:35 and Acts 20:7, where the church gathers on the first day of the week to break bread. Catholic tradition reads it that way, and the Catechism lists "the breaking of bread" among the names for the Eucharist and cites this passage when it does (CCC 1329). Keep the concession that the expression can denote an ordinary meal; the sense of individual Lukan occurrences is exegetically debated.

The prayers (*tais proseuchais*), with the definite article. Not prayer in general but *the* prayers. Acts 3:1 has Peter and John going up to the temple at the ninth hour, "the hour of prayer." The wording, together with Acts 3:1, points to participation in established appointed prayers at customary hours. That is an early liturgical pattern; it is not by itself proof of a distinct Christian office or a fixed set of Christian prayers.

What they did with their possessions, and how not to overstate it

Verses 44 and 45: all who believed were together and had all things in common, and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.

Two errors to avoid. The first is softening it into nothing. This was real, costly, and it is reported approvingly.

The second is turning it into a doctrinal mandate for common ownership. Acts 5:4 settles it: Peter tells Ananias that while the land remained unsold it remained his own, and after it was sold it was at his disposal. The sharing was voluntary, and the Church has taught the legitimacy of private property alongside the universal destination of goods (CCC 2402-2406). What is binding is the claim of the needy on the surplus of the comfortable, which is put about as sharply as it can be put at CCC 2446.

Two addresses

Verse 46: day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts.

They did not leave the temple. Public, formal, appointed worship in the place where everyone could see them, and then meals in houses. Both, daily. Anyone in your group who wants small groups instead of the parish, or the parish instead of anything personal, has to reckon with verse 46. Do not press the analogy too hard: the temple was not a parish, and Luke does not tell us that the houses held only fellowship and not worship.

Who adds

Verse 47: "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

The Lord is the one who adds, and he does it through the apostles' preaching and the community's life rather than around them. This is the question your group carried for eight weeks and answered last session, and tonight is the first time you can point at it directly, because it is now resolved rather than pending.

And be honest about "favor with all the people." It did not hold. By Acts 5:13 St. Luke reports that none of the rest dared join them, though the people held them in high honor, and by Acts 8:1 there is a great persecution. A community with the four devotions running was attractive, and it was also, quite soon, dangerous to join. Do not sell your group a permanent honeymoon.

Why this session sits in a study on evangelization

Because the destination of your friendship is not you. If a person says yes and there is nowhere to put them, you have done half a job and the half you did will not hold.

And there is a diagnostic in verse 42 that your leaders can use on their own parish and their own small group. Four things. Which of them does your community actually do? A parish with none of them has nothing to hand anybody. Tonight's steelman is built on exactly that problem, so do not resolve it early.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

No poor among you

Deuteronomy 15:4: "But there will be no poor among you." Acts 4:34 reports, in almost the same words, that there was not a needy person among them. Acts 4:34 strongly echoes that verse, and may be showing Israel's covenantal ideal realised for a time in Jerusalem.

Word, meal, sharing, joy

This is tonight's live discovery, so do not spend it. The passage is Nehemiah 8:1-12. Read it before the session with Acts 2:42-47 open next to it, and the shape will be obvious to you before your group finds it.

The manna measure

Exodus 16:18: he who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack. St. Paul quotes precisely this verse when he asks the Corinthians for money for the poor in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:15). The principle is older than the Church.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Justin Martyr describes a Sunday, around the year 155

Writing to a pagan emperor to explain what Christians actually do, St. Justin Martyr describes the Sunday assembly: everyone in the towns and the countryside gathers in one place; the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read for as long as time allows; the one presiding gives a talk urging imitation of these good things; all stand and pray; bread and wine and water are brought; the president offers prayers and thanksgiving; the people give their assent by saying Amen; the gifts are distributed, and deacons carry them to those who are absent. Then those who are prosperous give what they wish, and the collection is used for orphans, widows, the sick, prisoners, and strangers.

Read that list against Acts 2:42, and then against last Sunday. The same essential elements are still visibly present roughly a century after St. Luke wrote. Do not claim they appear in Acts 2:42's order; Justin's sequence runs readings and exhortation, prayers, Eucharist, then the collection.

St. Justin Martyr, First Apology, chapters 65 to 67 (c. AD 155).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Benedict XVI on three things that cannot be separated

Pope Benedict XVI wrote that the Church's deepest nature is expressed in a threefold responsibility: proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity. These duties presuppose each other, he said, and cannot be separated from one another.

That is Acts 2:42 to 45 stated as a principle. A community that preaches and does not serve, or serves and does not worship, has not chosen a specialty. It has lost something.

Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est 25 (2005).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Chrysostom on whose goods they are

Not to enable the poor to share in our goods, St. John Chrysostom said, is to steal from them and to deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.

The Catechism quotes him in exactly those words. Keep it in view before anyone gets comfortable calling verses 44 and 45 a first-century experiment that does not apply.

St. John Chrysostom, quoted at CCC 2446.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Catechism opens its subsection on the communion of spiritual goods by quoting tonight's primary verse, which tells you how foundational the Church takes these six verses to be.

- **CCC 949.** The Catechism opens its subsection on communion in spiritual goods by quoting Acts 2:42 itself. The treatment of the communion of saints begins earlier, at CCC 946.
- **CCC 953.** Communion in charity: nothing anyone does is done in isolation, and what each does affects all.
- **CCC 1329.** "The breaking of bread" is listed among the names of the Eucharist, with this passage cited.
- **CCC 2178.** The Sunday assembly of the faithful, with the practice traced back to the earliest Christians.
- **CCC 2446.** Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them. The Catechism quotes St. John Chrysostom saying so.
- **CCC 2402-2406.** The universal destination of goods together with the legitimacy of private property. Have this ready when verses 44 and 45 come up.
- Using verse 42 as a diagnostic on your own parish is our extension of these paragraphs, not their wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread B, now resolved, can finally be named out loud. Verse 47 says the Lord added. Last week the group learned that they are not the cause and not optional. Tonight you may point directly at "the Lord added to their number" and let them hear it as an answer rather than a problem. This is the first session in the study where you are allowed to be explicit about it.

Thread A, "With him, and sent." Building toward Session 12, where it pays off in a single phrase. Tonight it appears quietly in verse 46: they were together, daily. Do not comment.

New question introduced tonight and answered next week: what exactly are you handing someone to? Tonight the answer is the Church and her sacraments. Next week the answer gets sharper: to the capacity to do this themselves.

Watch for. The steelman tonight is about a disappointing parish, and it is the most personally raw objection in the study for anyone who has tried and failed to bring a friend into a cold room. Do not treat it as an excuse. Treat it as a wound and then answer it.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group name the four devotions precisely, out of the text, including what "the prayers" with the article suggests.
2. Handle verses 44 and 45 honestly in both directions: real and costly, and voluntary rather than mandated.
3. Establish that they kept both the temple and the houses, daily.
4. Point at verse 47 and let Thread B land as an answer now that it is resolved.
5. Have the group find the Old Testament shape of this community in Nehemiah 8.
6. Work the objection about a disappointing parish without dismissing it, and land the four devotions as a diagnostic they can use.
7. Move the ladder from conversation to a room: bring one of the three into something communal.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Field report on rung nine, praying for the one who already said no.
0:12-0:20	Win questions.
0:20-0:24	Read Acts 2:42-47 aloud twice. It is six verses.
0:24-0:40	Build 1 and 2, the four devotions and "the prayers."
0:40-0:50	Build 3, the possessions, with the honest handling in both directions.
0:50-1:00	Live discovery: Nehemiah 8 beside Acts 2.
1:00-1:10	Build 4 and 5, the two addresses and who adds.
1:10-1:24	Build 6, the build-then-press on a parish you cannot recommend. Give it the full time.
1:24-1:30	Send questions, Live It This Week, take-homes, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Fold Build 2 into Build 1 and make the point about "the prayers" in two sentences. Saves six minutes.
- Run the Nehemiah discovery as a straight reading with one question. Saves five minutes.
- Move Build 4 (the two addresses) to the take-home. Saves six minutes.
- Do not cut Build 3 or Build 6.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If the group turns verses 44 and 45 into a political argument, stop it quickly and read CCC 2402 through 2406 and then CCC 2446. The Catechism holds both halves better than the room will, and it is not anyone's partisan property.

If someone in the group is in real financial difficulty, tonight can shame them. Make sure the conversation about possessions is about surplus rather than about generosity as a personality trait, and do not let the room congratulate itself.

If someone uses the parish objection to announce that they have stopped going to Mass, do not correct them in the room. Hear them, keep going, and follow up in the week.

Anyone who was received into the Church recently may have strong feelings about how they were welcomed. If that surfaces, let it, and let it be uncomfortable. It is data, and it is exactly what this session is about.

Discussion Guide

They Devoted Themselves

Acts 2:42-47

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, on the day three thousand people said yes, you did not leave them standing in the street. You gave them teaching, and each other, and the breaking of the bread, and the prayers. Give us somewhere to bring the people we love, and make us willing to build it where it is missing. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Six minutes. Two or three people.

Last week you prayed daily for someone who has already heard and already declined. What was that like?

Leader: expect flatness or frustration. Receive it. Do not offer hope as a correction; last week's session already did that work and it does not need repeating tonight.

WIN

- ▶ Think of a group you joined where you actually felt like you belonged. What did they do in the first month?
- ▶ When you have brought a friend to something at church, what did you find yourself apologizing for on the way in?

BUILD

Read Acts 2:42-47 aloud twice. It is only six verses and the whole session lives in the detail, so the second reading matters more than usual.

1. Verse 42. How many things did they devote themselves to, and what are they? Be exact.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Four. The apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers.

The apostles' teaching. Not their own reading, and not the teaching of whoever they first heard the Gospel from. There is an authoritative source, and it is not the person who evangelized them. Say that out loud; it is one of the two reasons this session is in an evangelization study.

The fellowship. The word is *koinōnia*, a real sharing in common. Verses 44 and 45 give one concrete and costly expression of it: they sold things. It is not a coffee hour, and material sharing does not exhaust the

word.

The breaking of the bread. Catholic tradition reads this Eucharistically, and CCC 1329 lists the expression among the names of the Eucharist, citing this verse. He uses it at Luke 24:35, at the end of the Emmaus road you studied in Session 2, and at Acts 20:7 where the church gathers on the first day of the week to break bread. Honest commentators note the phrase can also mean an ordinary meal, and the sense of particular Lukan occurrences is debated. Catholic tradition reads it as the Eucharist, and the Catechism cites this verse when it lists the names of the Eucharist at CCC 1329.

The prayers. Next question.

2. Look closely at the fourth one. It is not "prayer." What does the definite article do, and what does Acts 3:1 add?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

It is "the prayers," a specific and appointed set. And Acts 3:1 has Peter and John going up to the temple at the ninth hour, which St. Luke calls "the hour of prayer."

The wording with Acts 3:1 points to appointed prayers at customary hours rather than only spontaneous prayer. Do not push it as far as a distinct Christian office; that is more than the verse carries.

Ask the group which of the four they personally find easiest, and which they have quietly dropped. Do not go around the room; take volunteers.

3. Verses 44 and 45. What did they do with their property? Now read Acts 5:4. What does that add?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They had all things in common, sold possessions and goods, and distributed to all as any had need. Acts 4:34 says there was not a needy person among them.

Acts 5:4 is Peter speaking to Ananias: while the land remained unsold, it remained his own, and after it was sold it was at his disposal. So the sharing was voluntary. It was not a rule and it was not enforced.

Both errors are available tonight and you should block both. Do not soften this into nothing; it was real, costly, and reported approvingly. And do not turn it into a mandate for common ownership; the Church has consistently taught the legitimacy of private property alongside the universal destination of goods (CCC 2402-2406).

What is binding is put about as sharply as it can be put, at CCC 2446, quoting St. John Chrysostom: not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Send them looking. This one is unusually satisfying.

Have someone read Nehemiah 8:1-12 aloud, slowly, with Acts 2:42-47 open next to it.

Then ask: what happens, in what order?

What they should find: the people gather as one. The book of the law is read aloud from morning until midday, and the people listen. Levites help them understand the reading. Then they are told the day is holy and they should not mourn, but go eat the fat and drink sweet wine, and **send portions to anyone for whom nothing is prepared**. And the people go away to eat and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words.

The word read and explained, then festive eating and drinking, then portions sent to anyone for whom nothing was prepared, then great rejoicing. That is an anticipatory pattern rather than an identity: Nehemiah has no Eucharist and does not reproduce all four devotions.

Then the useful question: what did the Levites do in Nehemiah 8:7-8, and who does that job now?

4. Verse 46. How many places are they meeting, and how often?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Two places, daily. The temple together, and breaking bread in their homes.

They did not leave the temple. Public, formal, appointed worship where everyone could see them, and then meals in houses.

St. Luke gives both, every day, and shows no sign of thinking there is a tension. Offer this as an analogous pattern of public worship and household life rather than as a proof text about parishes and small groups; the temple was not a parish.

5. Verse 47. Two things are reported. Who is doing the adding?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They were praising God and having favor with all the people. And **the Lord** added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The Lord is named as the one who adds. That does not sideline the apostles or the community; Acts shows him working through their preaching and their life. Point at it and let the room sit with it, because this is the question they carried for eight weeks and answered last session. Now it reads as an answer instead of a problem.

And be honest about the favor. It did not last. By Acts 5:13 St. Luke says none of the rest dared join them, and by Acts 8:1 there is a great persecution. A community with the four devotions running was genuinely attractive, and it also became dangerous to join. Do not let anyone leave tonight expecting a permanent honeymoon.

6. Someone says: I cannot in good conscience bring my friend to my parish. The music is bad, the homily is worse, nobody speaks to anyone, and a searching person will not survive it. I will disciple them myself. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. Do not treat this as an excuse. Most people who say it have already tried.

DIG DEEPER

Not a needy person among them. Acts 4:34 is nearly a quotation of Deuteronomy 15:4, "there will be no poor among you." The echo is strong, and may show that ideal realised in Jerusalem for a time.

The manna measure. Exodus 16:18 says the one who gathered much had nothing over and the one who gathered little had no lack. St. Paul quotes that exact verse when he is raising money for the poor in Jerusalem, at 2 Corinthians 8:15.

How long did it last? Acts 6:1 records a complaint that the Greek speaking widows were being neglected in the daily distribution, which is the first recorded administrative failure in Church history and arrives about four chapters after this idyll. The four devotions are a description of a real community, not a golden age.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it at full strength, and do not be defensive. Somebody in your room means it.

The complaint is often simply accurate. Plenty of parishes are cold, and a first time visitor can come and go without a single person speaking to them. Handing a searching friend an experience like that is not neutral; it can set them back years.

And Acts 2 seems to support the objection rather than answer it. The community St. Luke describes has all four devotions actually functioning. Handing someone to a body that has the sacraments and none of the fellowship is not obviously the same act St. Luke is describing.

For some people there is more than disappointment involved. Anyone who has been failed by the institution, or who knows someone who was, has reasons for hesitation that are not fussiness about music.

And there is a real Catholic principle inside the objection. The family is the domestic church. Formation genuinely does happen in houses, between friends, at kitchen tables, and Acts 2:46 says so.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First: verse 47 says the Lord added to **their number**. Added to a visible, identifiable community with apostles, a common life and a common table. Not to a private arrangement between four friends. For the first-day gathering, cite Acts 20:7 rather than this verse. Whatever the state of your parish, the destination in this passage is a visible community.

Second: verse 42 says the apostles' teaching. If you are the sole source of what your friend believes, then you are the authority, and that is bad for both of you. It is also, incidentally, the thing that makes people vulnerable when you turn out to be wrong about something, or when you move away.

Third, and this one is not negotiable: you cannot give anyone the Eucharist. Whatever else you can offer a friend, you cannot offer the breaking of the bread. If you do not hand them to the sacraments, you have handed them to yourself, and you are not enough. Session 4 already said this in the Samaritan town's words: they told the woman that they no longer believed because of what she said, and that was the compliment.

Now grant the objection what it has earned. A cold parish is a real problem and pretending otherwise insults the person raising it. Three honest responses. Go with them, every time, and sit with them. Find the part of your parish that does work, because there is almost always one, whether that is a particular Mass, a

particular priest, a ministry, or four people. And build the missing thing yourself; the four devotions are not a rating system for other people's parishes, they are a job description for yours.

Then hand the group the diagnostic. Take verse 42 and score your own parish, and then your own small group, on four items. The one that scores lowest is the one you are being asked to build.

SEND

- ▶ Take verse 42 and score your parish out of four. Which one is weakest, and what would it cost you to be part of fixing it?
- ▶ If one of your three said yes tomorrow, where exactly would you take them on Sunday? Name the Mass and the time.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 10 of the ladder. From conversation to a room. This week you bring somebody somewhere.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Invite one of them into something with other believers in it. A meal at your house with Catholic friends, a parish event, a service project, a Sunday Mass you go to together. A room, not a conversation.
- Go with them. Do not send them, do not meet them there, and do not leave them standing alone at any point.
- Do not apologise for being Catholic or for bringing them. Notice how strong the urge is.
- Afterward, write down who spoke to them that was not you. Bring the number back next week, whatever it is.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you did not save us one at a time and leave us that way. You gave us a Church, with teaching we did not invent, a table we cannot set ourselves, and people we did not choose. Forgive us for the times we have been embarrassed by her. Make our parishes worth bringing somebody to, and make us willing to be the ones who build what is missing. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Acts 2:42

Leader Reference Card

They Devoted Themselves

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

Passage	Where and why
Acts 2:42-47	Primary text, read aloud twice.
Acts 3:1	Build 2. The ninth hour, the hour of prayer.
Acts 5:4	Build 3. The sharing was voluntary; Peter says so to Ananias.
Acts 4:34	Build 3 and Dig Deeper. Not a needy person among them.
Acts 5:13; Acts 8:1	Build 5. The favor with all the people did not last.
Acts 6:1	Dig Deeper. The first administrative failure, four chapters later.
Acts 20:7	Build 1. Gathered on the first day of the week to break bread.
Luke 24:35	Build 1. Known to them in the breaking of the bread, from Session 2.
Nehemiah 8:1-12	Live discovery. Word, meal, portions for those with nothing, and great rejoicing.
Deuteronomy 15:4	Old Testament Roots. There will be no poor among you.
Exodus 16:18; 2 Corinthians 8:15	Old Testament Roots and Dig Deeper. The manna measure, quoted by St. Paul.
John 4:42	Build 6, the press. No longer because of your words, from Session 4.

Leader Preparation Guide

Until Christ Is Formed in You

Movement Four: Formation · Galatians 4:19; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12; 2 Timothy 2:2; Acts 18:24-28

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover from St. Paul's own descriptions of his pastoral work what accompaniment actually costs him, in his own bodily language, and then discover the four generation instruction in 2 Timothy 2:2 that makes formation reproduce instead of terminating in the person who did it.

Catholic Touchstone

Formation is personal, costly, and aimed past itself. In catechesis it is Christ who teaches, and everything else is taught with reference to him, so the person forming another has to be attached to Christ rather than substituting for him.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Galatians 4:19, and the word Paul chose

"My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!"

The verb is *ōdinō*, the word for labor pains. A man uses it about his own pastoral work, and does not seem to find it strange. Whatever St. Paul thought he was doing with the Galatians, it was not administration.

And note the word "again." He has already done this once with these people and he is doing it a second time. Formation is not a single successful handoff, and anyone in your group who has poured themselves into somebody who then drifted should hear that from the Apostle rather than from you.

Note also the goal, which is stated precisely: the goal reaches past agreement or membership: "until Christ be formed in you." The thing being produced is not a copy of the one forming.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, two family images in six verses

Verse 7: gentle among you, "like a nurse taking care of her children." Verse 11: "like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you." Maternal and paternal, in the same passage, about the same work.

Verse 8 is the cost: "we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us." Not the message only, but themselves; the passage is plural throughout, and this study treats Paul as speaking for the missionary team. And he gives the reason plainly: affection.

Verse 9 is the second cost: "you remember our labor and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you." They supported themselves by labour so as not to be a financial burden; if Paul's trade is invoked, cite Acts 18:3.

A textual note worth knowing before someone finds it. In verse 7 the manuscripts are genuinely divided between *ēpioi*, gentle, and *nēpioi*, little children or infants. It is one letter, and the preceding word ends in that letter, so a scribe could easily go either way. RSV2CE reads "gentle." Some modern translations read "infants," giving a striking image of the apostles as babies among them. Both readings are defensible and the evidence is genuinely split. If it comes up, say so; do not pretend the text is settled.

2 Timothy 2:2, and the verb that is not "teach"

"And what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

Count the generations: Paul, Timothy, faithful men, others also. Four, in one sentence.

And the verb is *parathou*, from the same word family as *parath'k'*, a deposit entrusted for safekeeping. Not broadcast, not explain, not teach. Entrust, in the sense of handing over something valuable for safekeeping.

The criteria are faithfulness and the ability to hand it on: the verse says faithful men "who will be able to teach others also". Timothy is told to look for people who will keep the deposit and be able to hand it on, and nothing is said about numbers.

Acts 18:24-28, the best model of correction in the New Testament

Apollos arrives at Ephesus: an Alexandrian, eloquent, well versed in the Scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord, fervent in spirit, and he "spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus." That is a remarkable list of compliments. And then: "though he knew only the baptism of John."

Priscilla and Aquila hear him, and "they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately." A married lay couple, tentmakers, take a brilliant public preacher aside privately and fill in what is missing. St. Luke names Priscilla first.

Notice everything that does not happen. No public correction, no letter to the leadership, no confrontation in the synagogue, and no attempt to shut him down. They took him.

And notice the result, which is the payoff of this session and the reason it comes where it does in the study.

The payoff your group will not see coming

Acts 18:27-28: Apollos crossed to Achaia, and there he "greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus."

Corinth was in Achaia, and Acts 19:1 places Apollos at Corinth. And the memory verse your group learned last week was 1 Corinthians 3:6: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."

That is the same Apollos. The man Priscilla and Aquila quietly corrected in a private conversation becomes the man St. Paul names as his fellow worker in the verse this group has been carrying around for a week. Do not tell them. Get it out of them in Build 6.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Elijah and Elisha, and what Elisha actually asked for

This is tonight's live discovery, and it turns on a detail most people have never noticed. The passages are 2 Kings 2:1-15 and Deuteronomy 21:17. Read them together before the session.

Moses and Joshua

Exodus 33:11 has Joshua, a young man, refusing to leave the tent of meeting. Numbers 27:18-23 has Moses laying hands on him publicly before the whole congregation. Deuteronomy 34:9 says Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. Years of proximity, then a public commissioning, then a real transfer.

Formation as domestic and constant

Deuteronomy 6:6-9: these words shall be upon your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise. The Old Testament assumes formation happens in ordinary hours rather than in scheduled sessions.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | The Rule of St. Benedict on adapting to the person in front of you

In its chapter on the abbot, the Rule of St. Benedict teaches in substance that one who is given charge of souls must adapt himself to many characters, coaxing one, reproving another, persuading another, and that he must accommodate himself to each according to what that person actually is.

The principle is fifteen centuries old and it is the opposite of a one-size-fits-all application of a curriculum; the Rule itself supplies a structured common programme. What forms one person will not form the next, and the person doing the forming has to change shape rather than expecting the other to.

The Rule of St. Benedict, chapter 2, on the qualities of the abbot. A faithful summary, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope St. Paul VI on the test of whether it worked

Pope St. Paul VI wrote that the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others, and he called this the test of truth and the touchstone of evangelization. It is unthinkable, he said, that someone should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming someone who bears witness to it and proclaims it in turn.

That is 2 Timothy 2:2 stated as a criterion. Formation should ordinarily dispose people to hand on what they received, while respecting their freedom and their circumstances.

Pope St. Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi 24 (1975).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine on the conversation he could not get

In the Confessions, St. Augustine describes wanting to pour out his troubles to St. Ambrose and repeatedly being unable to obtain the sustained private conversation he wanted. The bishop was besieged by people with needs, and in the little time he had free he was reading or resting, and Augustine could not bring himself to interrupt. The long private conversation he wanted never came about, though he did have some contact with him.

And he was formed anyway, by hearing the man preach and by watching how he handled the Scriptures. That indirect presence and observation can form a person is the inference this study draws from his

account. This is worth holding onto by anyone convinced they are failing because they cannot get the ideal one to one time. Sometimes the formation is happening in the parts you are not counting.

St. Augustine, Confessions VI.3-4.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Catechism is unusually direct about who is actually doing the teaching when one Christian forms another.

- **CCC 426.** At the heart of catechesis we find a Person, the Person of Jesus Christ. This is the same sentence Session 1 was built on, now applied to formation rather than to first contact.
- **CCC 427.** In catechesis it is Christ who is taught, and Christ alone who teaches; anyone else teaches to the extent that he is Christ's spokesman, and must let Christ teach through his mouth. The Catechism is explicit that the catechist has to attach himself to Christ rather than stand in for him.
- **CCC 5.** Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people, and adults, with a view to initiating them into the fullness of Christian life. Note the word initiating: it is aimed past itself.
- **CCC 900.** The laity have the obligation and the right to work so that the divine message of salvation is known and accepted.
- **CCC 1656-1657.** The family is the domestic church, and parents are the first heralds of the faith for their children.
- **CCC 2226.** Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God.
- Applying CCC 427 to a coffee shop conversation with a friend is our extension of the paragraph, not its wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent." One session from payoff. Tonight it is running underneath 2 Timothy 2:2: the people entrusted with the deposit are chosen so that they can hand it on. Do not comment; Session 12 has the phrase that closes it.

Thread B. Resolved. If it comes up tonight in the form "so who formed Apollos, really," you may answer it directly now. That freedom is new as of last week.

The Movement Four question, answered tonight. Last week: what are you handing them to? The Church and her sacraments. This week the sharper answer: to the capacity to do this without you.

Watch for. Somebody in your group has poured years into a person who drifted. Galatians 4:19 says "again." Make sure that word lands on them, and do not turn it into a lesson for the whole room.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group notice that St. Paul reaches for childbirth, nursing, and fatherhood to describe what most of us would describe as mentoring.

2. Land the cost in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 and 2:9: not the gospel only but himself, and a job worked at night so his presence would cost them nothing.
3. Have them count the four generations in 2 Timothy 2:2 and notice the verb is entrust rather than teach.
4. Work Acts 18:24-28 as the model of private correction of a sincere and partly wrong believer.
5. Let the group discover for themselves that this Apollos is the Apollos of the verse they memorized last week.
6. Have them find what a double portion actually meant, from Deuteronomy 21:17.
7. Move the ladder to handing over: connect one of the three to someone who is not you.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Field report on rung ten, bringing someone into a room.
0:12-0:18	Win questions.
0:18-0:24	Read all four passages aloud, in the order listed, with Acts last.
0:24-0:36	Build 1 and 2, the labor pains and the two family images.
0:36-0:44	Build 3, 2 Timothy 2:2 and the four generations.
0:44-0:54	Live discovery: what Elisha asked for.
0:54-1:06	Build 4 and 5, Apollos and how he was corrected.
1:06-1:14	Build 6, the payoff. Do not rush this.
1:14-1:24	Build 7, the build-then-press on multiplication language.
1:24-1:30	Send questions, Live It This Week, take-homes, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Read only Galatians 4:19, 2 Timothy 2:2, and Acts 18:24-28 aloud, and summarize 1 Thessalonians yourself. Saves five minutes.
- Run the Elisha discovery with 2 Kings 2:9-14 only, plus Deuteronomy 21:17. Saves five minutes and keeps the payoff intact.
- Fold Build 2 into Build 1. Saves eight minutes.
- Do not cut Build 6. It is the best cross-session moment in the study.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If someone hears "spiritual father" or "spiritual mother" as a claim to authority over another adult, take it seriously and answer from CCC 427: it is Christ who teaches, and the person forming is a spokesman rather than a substitute. St. Paul's images do not license domination or substituting yourself for Christ. They do not

deny the real derivative authority of parents, clergy and catechists either.

Anyone in your group who is a parent of an adult child who has left the faith will hear Deuteronomy 6 and 1 Thessalonians 2 as an indictment. Get ahead of it. Say out loud, once, that formation done faithfully does not guarantee an outcome, and point back to Session 9 rather than restating it.

If the group starts building a program tonight, slow them down. Acts 18 has no program in it. Two tentmakers had a private conversation.

If someone volunteers that they are the Apollos in the room, sincere and recently corrected, receive it warmly and move on quickly. Do not let the group examine them.

Discussion Guide

Until Christ Is Formed in You

Galatians 4:19; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12; 2 Timothy 2:2; Acts 18:24-28

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you formed twelve men slowly, in ordinary hours, and one of them still walked away. Give us patience for the long work, and keep us from needing to see the finish. Form yourself in the people we love, and let us not mind if they end up nothing like us. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Six minutes. Two or three people.

Last week you brought someone into a room with other believers in it. Who spoke to them that was not you?

Leader: if the answer is nobody, do not defend the parish. Write the number down. It is the most useful piece of data your group will produce in thirteen weeks, and it belongs in front of whoever runs hospitality.

WIN

- ▶ Who taught you something that stuck? What did they actually spend on you?
- ▶ Have you ever been corrected privately by someone who could have embarrassed you publicly? What did that do?

BUILD

Read all four passages aloud in order: Galatians 4:19, then 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, then 2 Timothy 2:2, then Acts 18:24-28. Read the Acts passage last and read it twice, because the session ends there.

- 1. Galatians 4:19. What image does St. Paul reach for, and what is strange about him using it? Then look at one small word in the middle.**

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Childbirth. The verb is the one used for labor pains. A man uses it about his pastoral work and shows no sign of finding it odd.

The small word is "again." He has already done this once with these people and is now doing it a second time. Whatever formation is, it is not a single successful handoff.

Say that plainly, and then leave it alone. Somebody in this room has poured years into a person who

drifted, and the Apostle has just told them he had the same experience with an entire province.

And notice the goal: the goal reaches past agreement and past membership: "until Christ be formed in you." What is being produced is not a copy of the one doing the forming.

2. 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12. Find two different family images. Then find the two things it cost him.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Verse 7: like a nurse taking care of her children. Verse 11: like a father with his children. Maternal and paternal, six verses apart, about the same work and the same people.

The first cost is verse 8: they shared with them not only the gospel of God but their own selves, and he gives the reason, that they had become very dear to him. The affection is the stated cause, not a technique with warmth applied afterward.

The second cost is verse 9: they worked night and day so as not to burden any of them, supporting themselves by labour rather than being kept.

Ask the group which of those two costs they find harder, and why.

DIG DEEPER

A one letter problem in verse 7. The manuscripts are split between *ēpioi*, gentle, and *nēpioi*, infants, and the preceding word ends in that same letter, so a scribe could easily double it or drop it. RSV2CE reads "gentle." Several modern translations read "infants," giving the startling picture of apostles as babies among them. The evidence is genuinely divided. If a friend with a study Bible raises this, the honest answer is that we do not know, and that the passage works either way.

3. 2 Timothy 2:2. Count the generations in this one sentence. Then look hard at the verb.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Four. Paul, then Timothy, then faithful men, then others also. One sentence, four handoffs deep.

And the verb is not teach. It is entrust, and it belongs to the same word family as *parathēkē*, a deposit left with someone for safekeeping. You are not being asked to broadcast something. You are being asked to hand over something valuable to a person who will keep it.

Notice the criteria: faithful, and able to teach others. Both are in the verse. What is not in it is prominence, eloquence, or reach; nothing is said about numbers anywhere.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Do not preview this. Most people have never noticed it.

Have someone read 2 Kings 2:1-14 aloud. It is a striking scene and worth the time.

First question: how many times does Elijah tell Elisha to stay behind, and what does Elisha say each time?

Second question: what does Elisha ask for when he is finally offered anything?

Now have a second person read Deuteronomy 21:17.

What they should find: a double portion is not a request for twice the power. Deuteronomy 21:17 says the firstborn son is acknowledged by giving him a double portion of everything the father has. In light of Deuteronomy 21:17 this is traditionally read as the firstborn's share, so Elisha appears to be asking for recognition as Elijah's heir rather than simply for twice the power. The wording of 2 Kings 2:9 does not state that conclusion outright.

Then read 2 Kings 2:12 aloud yourself. As Elijah goes up, Elisha cries out, "My father, my father!" That is the address the narrative gives us at the parting. The sons of the prophets speak of Elijah as Elisha's master; here Elisha calls him father.

4. Acts 18:24-28. Make a list of everything the text says was right about Apollos. Then find the one thing that was missing.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

An Alexandrian, eloquent, well versed in the Scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord, fervent in spirit, and he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, and he spoke boldly in the synagogue. That is an extraordinary list of compliments.

And then: "though he knew only the baptism of John." His knowledge was still incomplete, in a man who was otherwise right, effective, and sincere.

Ask the group who they know who fits that description. Almost everyone will have someone: a Protestant friend who loves Christ and is missing something, or a Catholic who is fervent and has one piece badly wrong.

5. Verse 26. How is he corrected? List what happens, and then list what does not happen.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

What happens: Priscilla and Aquila hear him, take him, and expound to him the way of God more accurately. A married lay couple, tentmakers by trade, take a brilliant public preacher aside privately. St. Luke names Priscilla first.

What does not happen: no public correction, no letter to the leadership, no confrontation in the synagogue, no attempt to have him silenced, and no announcement to anyone that he had been wrong.

The verb is "took him," and everything in the session turns on it. Correction offered privately, by people with no standing to demand it, away from the public exchange of the synagogue. Acts does not tell us they had a prior relationship with him; what it shows is that they took him aside.

Point back to Session 3 if the group needs it: correction inside a friendship is a work of mercy, and correction from outside one is usually just noise.

6. Verses 27 and 28. Where does Apollos go next, and what does he do there? Now think about the verse you memorized last week.

Leader: ask the second half slowly, and let the room get there on its own. Do not say the name.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He crosses to Achaia, and there he greatly helps those who through grace had believed, and powerfully confutes opponents in public, showing from the Scriptures that the Christ is Jesus.

Corinth was in Achaia, and Acts 19:1 places Apollos there. And last week this group memorized 1 Corinthians 3:6: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."

It is the same man. The preacher Priscilla and Aquila quietly took aside becomes the fellow worker St. Paul names to the Corinthians, in the verse your group has been carrying around for seven days.

Let that sit. Luke records one private conversation between two tentmakers and a man who was almost right, and the fruit of it shows up in a letter that has been read in the Church for two thousand years.

And note where it lands the group: they will never know what their small correction, or their invitation, or their unremarkable errand, turns into.

7. Someone says: this multiplication language turns people into a pipeline. "Disciples who make disciples" is a church growth technique with a Bible verse attached, and real friendship is not a strategy. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. The objection is describing a real failure mode accurately and drawing the wrong conclusion from it.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it at full strength, because the failure it describes is common and everyone has smelled it.

People can tell when they are a project. Being someone's spiritual assignment is degrading, and the person on the receiving end always knows, however warm the manner.

Discipleship multiplication has a real history as a program, complete with charts, tiers, and metrics, and it has produced a great many exhausted people running systems on other people's souls.

And there is a Catholic version of the problem: parishes importing models built for a different ecclesiology, ending up with pipelines where they should have had a parish.

The strongest form of the objection comes from tonight's own text. Galatians 4:19 is labor pains, not throughput. Nobody goes into travail over a conversion funnel. If St. Paul's language is bodily and costly, then managerial language about generations is a foreign import.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First: read 2 Timothy 2:2 again and notice what it does not say. It does not say teach many people. It says entrust what you heard to faithful men who will be able to teach others. The verb is about handing over a deposit for safekeeping, and the criterion is faithfulness. There is no number anywhere in the verse.

Second: 1 Thessalonians 2:8 states the motive out loud. He shared his own self with them **because they had become very dear to him**. The affection is given as the cause. That is not a technique with warmth added;

it is warmth that produced the work.

Third: Acts 18 has no program in it at all. Two tentmakers heard a man preach, took him aside, and talked to him. If multiplication were a system, this is where the New Testament would show us the system, and instead it shows us a private conversation between three people who worked with their hands.

Fourth: Galatians 4:19 says "again," which no pipeline says. A pipeline does not go into labor twice over the same person.

Now name the real distinction, and give the objector the credit. Multiplication without travail is exactly the pipeline they are describing, and they are right to hate it. Travail without multiplication terminates in you, which is the failure Session 10 named: the friend who has you and nothing else. The answer is not to drop 2 Timothy 2:2. It is to keep it welded to Galatians 4:19, so that what reproduces is the labor and not the system.

SEND

- ▶ Who has poured into you? Have you ever told them?
- ▶ Is there anyone whose faith currently depends more on you than on Christ and his Church? What would it take to change that?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 11 of the ladder. Hand something over. This week you deliberately make yourself less central.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Introduce one of the three to another believer who is not you, and then get out of the way. A dinner, an introduction after Mass, a text that puts two people in touch.
- Then leave it alone for a week. Do not check on it, do not ask how it went, and notice what that costs you.
- Separately: name one person you could hand this study to. Someone faithful, who would be able to lead it for others. Write the name down.
- And if there is someone who formed you, tell them this week. Many never learn what their care produced.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you are the one who teaches, and everyone else is only lending you a voice. Take from us any wish to be needed. Give us the patience of a long labor and the freedom to be forgotten, and form yourself in the people you have put in front of us, whatever it costs and however little of it we get to see. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!"

Galatians 4:19

Leader Reference Card

Until Christ Is Formed in You

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

Passage	Where and why
Galatians 4:19	Primary text. Labor pains, and the word "again."
1 Thessalonians 2:7-12	Primary text. The nurse and the father, and the two costs.
2 Timothy 2:2	Primary text. Four generations, and the verb "entrust."
Acts 18:24-28	Primary text, read twice. Apollos, and the private correction.
Acts 19:1	Build 6. Places Apollos at Corinth, which was in Achaia.
1 Corinthians 3:6	Build 6. Last week's memory verse, and the payoff.
1 Corinthians 4:15	Leader prep. Countless guides, but not many fathers.
2 Kings 2:1-14	Live discovery. Elisha refuses to leave, and asks for a double portion.
Deuteronomy 21:17	Live discovery. The double portion is the firstborn son's inheritance.
Exodus 33:11	Old Testament Roots. Joshua would not depart from the tent.
Numbers 27:18-23; Deuteronomy 34:9	Old Testament Roots. Moses lays hands on Joshua.
Deuteronomy 6:6-9	Old Testament Roots. Teaching in ordinary hours, at home and on the road.

Leader Preparation Guide

Go Home to Your Friends

Movement Five: Sending · Mark 5:1-20; Luke 10:1-20

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover that the first person in St. Mark's Gospel commissioned to proclaim what the Lord has done for him is a man Jesus refused to let follow him, that the man asked in Greek for exactly what the Twelve had been given, and that he was sent instead to the hardest possible audience: the people who knew him before.

Catholic Touchstone

The lay faithful are sent into the ordinary places where they already live, and the mission is specific to each person rather than interchangeable. Anyone who has truly met Christ does not need lengthy training before speaking about him.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

A pastoral safety note, before anything else

Mark 5:1-5 describes a man living among the tombs, uncontrollable, crying out night and day and bruising himself with stones. Some in your room will hear that as a description of severe mental illness or self harm, and some will hear it because they have lived near it.

Handle it cleanly and once. The Gospel presents this as possession. The Church distinguishes possession from illness, and requires medical and psychological evaluation before a solemn or major exorcism precisely because the two are not to be confused (see CCC 1673 and the applicable diocesan norms). Nothing in this session licenses anyone to diagnose anybody.

Say it briefly, do not make a topic of it, and move to the part of the passage the session is actually about. If someone in the room is carrying self harm or a family member in crisis, notice and do not pursue it publicly. Where there is any sign of present risk, do not leave it for the week: speak with them privately before they leave, follow your diocesan safeguarding policy, and involve emergency or clinical help where warranted.

The town asks him to leave

Verse 15: they come out and find the man sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, "and they were afraid."

Verse 17: they begin to beg Jesus to depart from their neighborhood.

St. Mark gives fear as the reason and reports the economic loss without commenting on the connection. Do not overclaim their motive. What the text does say is that a town looked at a healed man, was afraid, and asked the healer to leave.

This is worth one honest minute with your group. St. Mark gives fear as the reason and reports the loss of the herd without telling us how the two connect, so do not assign the town a motive. As an application only, ask

whether some of the people they are praying for are inside arrangements where a real change would cost other people something.

The phrase that closes Thread A

Verse 18: "the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him."

Look at the Greek against Mark 3:14. In 3:14 Jesus appointed twelve *hina ōsin met' autou*, that they might be with him. In 5:18 the man begs *hina met' autou ē*, that he might be with him. The same construction, singular instead of plural. St. Mark gives this man the same construction the Twelve were appointed with, adjusted from plural to singular.

And Jesus refuses. This is tonight's live discovery and it is the payoff of a thread planted in the first session, so protect it and let the group find it themselves.

What he gets instead

Verse 19: "But he refused, and said to him, Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

It is not a lesser assignment. It is a different one, and personally a hard one; St. Mark makes no comparison with the apostolic mission, and neither should we. The Twelve got to stay near him. This man got sent to the people who had watched him live among the graves.

Note also what the content of the message is: how much the Lord has done for **you**, and the mercy shown to **you**. Jesus centres this man's proclamation on what the Lord has done and the mercy shown him. That is not a prohibition on doctrine, argument or invitation, and the message itself makes real claims about the Lord. What it is, is the before and after of one life.

And verse 20: he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much **Jesus** had done for him. Jesus said "the Lord." The man said "Jesus." St. Mark lets that stand without comment, and it is not nothing.

Luke 10, and where they are sent

Verse 1: he sent them two by two "into every town and place where he himself was about to come." They go ahead of him, to places he is coming to anyway. That single clause is most of the theology of evangelization: you are not delivering Christ to a place he has not reached, you are going ahead of someone already on his way.

Verse 2: the harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few, so **pray** the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers. The first command in the sending is a command to pray for more senders, not to go.

Verses 4 to 9: no purse, no bag, no sandals; say "Peace be to this house"; stay in one house rather than shopping for a better one; eat what is set before you; heal the sick; and say that the kingdom of God has come near.

Verses 10 and 11: if a town will not receive them, they wipe the dust off their feet, **and say it anyway**: nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near. The last word they are told to say to a town that refuses is still the announcement, though verse 12 follows with a warning of judgment.

And the redirect at the end

Verse 17: they return with joy, saying even the demons are subject to us in your name. Verse 20: "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

They came back from a successful mission and Jesus redirected their joy away from the results. Not "do not be glad," but "be glad about the right thing."

This is the sentence to end the study's twelfth session on, because in one week these people finish thirteen weeks of practice and some of them will have visible fruit and some will have none, and the verse is addressed to both.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Peace to this house

The greeting in Luke 10:5 is the Greek greeting of peace, standing behind which the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24-26 is a possible biblical background. The disciples are not being polite; they are pronouncing something over a household before they have said anything else.

Shaking off the dust

A recognized gesture on leaving territory considered unclean, and the apostles use it at Acts 13:51 when they are driven out of Antioch in Pisidia. What is striking in Luke 10:11 is that the gesture does not end the message; the announcement is repeated after it.

Names written in a book

Exodus 32:32-33, where Moses asks to be blotted out of God's book in place of the people. Psalm 69:28. Daniel 12:1, everyone whose name is found written in the book. Malachi 3:16, a book of remembrance written before the Lord. Luke 10:20 is standing on all of it, and Revelation 21:27 closes it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | The Second Vatican Council on where the laity are sent

The Council taught that the laity live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very fabric of their existence is woven, that they are called there by God, and that by exercising their own proper function, led by the spirit of the Gospel, they work for the sanctification of the world from within, like leaven.

From within. The Council is describing the distinctive secular character of the lay vocation: they are called in the ordinary circumstances where they already live. It does not thereby exclude other legitimate forms of lay apostolate. That is Mark 5:19 in conciliar language.

Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium 31 (1964).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Francis on how much training this requires

Pope Francis wrote that every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus, and that we should no longer speak of ourselves as disciples and missionaries as though these were two stages, but as missionary disciples.

And then the line that describes the man in the tombs exactly: anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim it. The man in Mark 5 had known Jesus for perhaps an hour.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium 120 (2013).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Henry Newman on a mission that is yours

God has created me, wrote St. John Henry Newman, to do him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission.

He goes on to say that he may never know what it is in this life, but that he will be told it in the next, and that he is a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. This is for anyone who has spent twelve weeks quietly suspecting that the real work belongs to somebody else.

St. John Henry Newman, Meditations and Devotions, from the meditation on hope in God the Creator. Work-level citation.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Church is unusually concrete about the fact that ordinary Christians are sent, and sent where they already are.

- **CCC 851.** The source of the Church's missionary zeal is God's love for all people.
- **CCC 863.** The whole Church is apostolic, and every member shares in her mission in their own way.
- **CCC 899.** The initiative of lay Christians is necessary, and they are on the front lines of the Church's life.
- **CCC 900.** The laity have the obligation and the right, individually or in groups, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted.
- **CCC 1816.** The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, bear witness to it, and spread it. The Catechism uses all four verbs.
- Applying CCC 1816 to the specific relatives at your own table is our extension of the paragraph, not its wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent," RESOLVES TONIGHT. It was planted in Session 1 on Mark 3:14 and it closes on Mark 5:18, in St. Mark's own Greek. The man asks for the first half and is given the second. Get this out of the group through the live discovery; do not announce it. If the room does not see it, give them Mark 3:14 and read it beside 5:18 and wait.

Thread B. Resolved in Session 9. Tonight it recurs quietly in Luke 10:1, where they are sent ahead to places Christ is already coming to, and in Luke 10:2, where the first command is to pray. You may name it now.

Thread C. Resolved in Session 8. Tonight's steelman touches it again, and the honest answer points at the module on the people closest to you rather than resolving it here.

One week left. Session 13 is a commissioning. Tell the group at the end of tonight that next week is the last session and ask them to bring their three names, written down again from memory if the sealed page is lost.

SESSION GOALS

1. Give the pastoral note on possession and illness cleanly, once, and move on.

2. Have the group report only what St. Mark reports: they saw the healed man, they were afraid, and they asked Jesus to leave.
3. Have the group find, from the Greek in translation, that the healed man asked for precisely what the Twelve were given, and that he was refused.
4. Establish that he was given a different assignment rather than a lesser one, and that its content was the before and after of his own life.
5. Land Luke 10:1: they are sent ahead of Christ to places he is already coming to.
6. Land Luke 10:20: the joy is redirected off the results, one week before the study ends.
7. Work the objection that you cannot evangelize the people who knew you before.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:04	Opening prayer.
0:04-0:11	Field report on rung eleven, handing someone over.
0:11-0:17	Win questions.
0:17-0:23	Read Mark 5:1-20 aloud. Give the pastoral note in two sentences before you start.
0:23-0:33	Build 1 and 2, the man and the town's reaction.
0:33-0:45	Build 3 and the live discovery. This is the payoff of the whole study; protect the time.
0:45-0:55	Build 4 and 5, the assignment and what he actually did.
0:55-1:00	Read Luke 10:1-20 aloud.
1:00-1:12	Build 6 and 7, where they are sent, and what is said even to a town that refuses.
1:12-1:18	Build 8, the redirect of joy.
1:18-1:26	Build 9, the build-then-press on the hometown.
1:26-1:30	Send questions, Live It This Week, take-homes, note about next week, closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Read only Luke 10:1-11 and 17-20 aloud rather than the whole passage. Saves four minutes.
- Fold Build 7 into Build 6. Saves six minutes.
- Cut Build 2 (the town's reaction); the take-home recap already carries it. Saves eight minutes.
- **Do not cut Build 3 or the live discovery under any circumstances.** If you are badly over, cut Build 9 and carry the hometown objection into the module on the people closest to you, where it belongs anyway.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If the room starts diagnosing the Gerasene, stop it in one sentence with the note above and redirect to verse 18. Do not debate it.

If someone is unsettled that Jesus said no to a sincere and grateful request, do not smooth it over. Sit in it. He said no to a good request in order to give a better assignment, and that is worth being unsettled by for a minute.

Somebody in your group has a sibling or a parent who remembers exactly who they were at nineteen, and tonight's steelman is their session. Do not resolve their situation in the room; point them at the module.

If someone reports visible fruit from the last eleven weeks and the room starts congratulating them, let it run for thirty seconds and then read Luke 10:20 aloud. That is what the verse is for and this is the week it is needed.

Discussion Guide

Go Home to Your Friends

Mark 5:1-20; Luke 10:1-20

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you healed a man nobody could bind, and when he asked to come with you, you told him to go home. Give us that obedience. Send us to the people who knew us before, who remember exactly who we were, and let the change in us say what our words cannot. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Six minutes. Two or three people.

Last week you introduced one of the three to another believer and then left it alone for a week. What did it cost you to leave it alone?

Leader: if somebody could not resist checking in, that is the most honest report available and should be received warmly. Say so.

WIN

- ▶ Who knew you before? Name the category, not the person: the people who remember a version of you that you would rather they forgot.
- ▶ When has somebody's change been so visible that you had to ask about it?

BUILD

Before you read: this passage describes a man who is possessed, and the Church has always distinguished possession from mental illness, which is why she requires medical and psychological evaluation before a solemn or major exorcism (CCC 1673 and diocesan norms). Nothing here licenses diagnosing anybody. Now read Mark 5:1-20 aloud.

1. Verses 1 to 5. Describe the man's situation before the encounter. What had been tried?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He lived among the tombs. No one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. He had wrenched apart chains and broken fetters, no one had the strength to subdue him, and night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was crying out and bruising himself with stones.

What had been tried was restraint, repeatedly, and it had failed. The community had done the only thing it

knew how to do and had run out of options.

Keep the leader note in mind and do not let the group turn this into a discussion of mental illness. Give the distinction once, plainly, and move to verse 15.

2. Verses 15 to 17. What do the townspeople find, and what do they ask for?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They find him sitting there, clothed and in his right mind. And St. Mark says they were afraid, and they began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighborhood.

A town looked at a healed man and asked the healer to leave. St. Mark gives fear as the reason and mentions the loss of the herd without telling us how the two are connected, so do not overclaim their motive.

Then ask the honest question. As an application rather than as the text's stated motive: are some of the people your group is praying for inside arrangements where a real change would cost other people something? Who, in their case?

3. Verse 18. The man makes one request. What is it, in the exact words St. Mark uses?

Leader: get the wording precise before moving to the discovery. It matters that they hear the phrase.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He begged him "that he might be with him."

Not that he might be healed, or protected, or given anything. He asked to be near Jesus. It is the most natural request in the passage and by any human measure the right one.

Now go to the discovery below before you say anything else.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

This is the payoff of a thread planted in the first session. Do not announce it. Let them find it.

Have someone read Mark 5:18 aloud again, slowly.

Then have a second person turn back and read Mark 3:14 aloud.

Then ask one question and wait: what did the Twelve get appointed for, and what did this man ask for?

What they should find: the construction is the same, adjusted from plural to singular. In 3:14 Jesus appointed twelve that they might be with him, and to be sent out to preach. In 5:18 this man begs that he might be with him. St. Mark gives him the same substantive construction, adjusted from plural to singular: he asks for the first half of what the Twelve were given.

And Jesus refuses him. Let the room sit with that for a moment before anyone rescues it. The man asked for the thing this whole study said comes first, and he was told no.

Then, and only then, read verse 19 aloud.

4. Verse 19. What does Jesus give him instead? Is it a smaller assignment or a different one?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

It is not smaller. It is different, and personally hard. The Twelve got to stay near him and travel with him. This man was sent alone to the people who had watched him live among the graves.

And look at what he is told to say. How much the Lord has done for you. The mercy shown to you. He centres it on what the Lord has done and the mercy shown him. That is not a ban on doctrine or invitation, and the message makes real claims. What it is, is the before and after of one life, which is exactly the sentence your group wrote in Session 6.

Ask them what it means that the study's first six weeks and this man's entire training amount to roughly the same thing.

5. Verse 20. What does he actually do, and what one word does he change?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much **Jesus** had done for him, and all men marveled.

Jesus told him to say what the Lord had done. He said what Jesus had done. St. Mark records the substitution and does not comment on it.

And notice the territory. The Decapolis was largely Hellenistic territory. He proclaims it through the largely Gentile Decapolis, with no training, no companions, and about an hour of acquaintance with Christ. St. Mark does not identify every hearer, so speak of the region rather than of a demonstrably Gentile mission.

6. Now read Luke 10:1-11. Verse 1 says where they are sent. Read that clause slowly. And what is the very first command in verse 2?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They are sent two by two into every town and place "where he himself was about to come." They go ahead of him, to places he is already on his way to.

Say what that settles. You are not carrying Christ into a place his grace has not preceded you; you are going ahead of someone already on his way. You are going ahead of someone already coming, which is a completely different job and a much lighter one.

And the first command is not go. It is pray: the harvest is plentiful and the laborers few, so pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. The sending begins with a request for more senders.

Then note the instructions themselves: no purse, no bag, no sandals. Say peace to the house before anything else. Stay in one house rather than looking for a better offer. Eat what is set in front of you. The whole posture is one of dependence on the people being visited.

7. Verses 10 and 11. What are they told to do in a town that refuses them, and what do they say on the way out?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They wipe the dust of the town off their feet, a recognized gesture, used again by the apostles at Acts 13:51.

And then they say it anyway: "Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near."

The last word to a town that has rejected them is still the announcement. The gesture does not cancel the message, and the refusal does not make the kingdom less near. Ask the group what that changes about how a failed conversation ends.

8. Verses 17 to 20. What do the seventy come back rejoicing about, and what does Jesus do with their joy?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They come back with joy: even the demons are subject to us in your name. It is a real result and Jesus does not deny it.

And he redirects it: "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Not "do not be glad." Be glad about the right thing. Results are real, and they are the wrong foundation, because results vary and belonging to Christ is a surer ground. Say it that way; the Church does not grant certainty of final perseverance apart from special revelation.

Read this one twice. In one week this group finishes thirteen weeks of practice. Some of them will have something visible to show and some will have nothing, and this verse is addressed to both of them in exactly the same words.

9. Someone says: you cannot evangelize the people who knew you before. Jesus himself could do no mighty work in his hometown. Send me anywhere but home. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below, and note where it ends: this objection has a whole module of its own, and tonight is not where it gets fully answered.

DIG DEEPER

Did it last? In Mark 7:31 Jesus returns through the region of the Decapolis, and in Mark 8:1-9 a great crowd is with him there, in Gentile territory, with nothing to eat. Many readers connect those crowds to the man's preaching. St. Mark does not say so, and it cannot be proved. It is a connection worth noticing and not worth asserting.

Seventy, or seventy-two? The manuscripts are divided here, and RSV2CE reads seventy, which is the number this study uses throughout. One scholarly proposal links the variant to the differing totals of the nations in the Hebrew and Greek forms of Genesis 10; treat that as a proposal, since the counts and the manuscript traditions both need care. Either way the point is the same: the mission is aimed at all the nations.

Names written in heaven. Exodus 32:32-33, Psalm 69:28, Daniel 12:1, and Malachi 3:16 all have a book

with names in it. Luke 10:20 stands on that whole tradition, and Revelation 21:27 closes it.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it at full strength. This is the most personally felt objection in the study.

The Lord's own experience supports it. Mark 6:1-6: a prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own kin, and in his own house. And St. Mark says plainly that he could do no mighty work there, and that he marveled because of their unbelief.

John 7:5 is worse: even his own brothers did not believe in him. If the sinless Son of God could not get traction with his relatives, the odds for the rest of us are not encouraging.

And everyone in this room has the specific version of it. A sibling who remembers who you were at nineteen. A parent who thinks this is a phase. A friend from before who finds the new you slightly ridiculous. Familiarity does produce a real deafness, and pushing against it has broken relationships that never recovered.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First: read Mark 5:19 again. The first person in this Gospel commissioned to proclaim what the Lord has done for him is sent home. "Go home to your friends." Note the precise claim: Jesus also sends the cleansed leper to the priest back in 1:44, so this is the first commission to proclaim, not the first sending of any kind. He sent a man to the exact audience this objection says is impossible, and he did it deliberately, in preference to letting the man come with him.

Second: verse 20 says he obeyed, proclaimed throughout the Decapolis, and all men marvelled. Note precisely what that reports and what it does not: amazement, not conversion. It is still a wider hearing than most of what happens in this Gospel.

Third: notice the difference between the two cases. In Nazareth, St. Mark tells us what the obstacle was: they were offended at his wisdom and his mighty works because they knew his family and his trade, and he marvelled at their unbelief. In the Decapolis, the man's before and after was the entire message, and everyone had seen both halves. So the hometown is not automatically closed. Familiarity and unbelief are a real obstacle, and a change that people can actually see is a different thing from an argument.

Fourth: verse 19 tells him what to say, and it is not an argument. It is what the Lord did for him and the mercy shown to him. That is precisely the one thing his neighbors could not dispute, because they had watched the first half of it.

And give the objection its due, because it has earned more than one session can give it. The people closest to you are the hardest room in Christianity, and the failure modes there are specific: holiday ambushes, the weaponized text message, the parent who cannot stop. This study has a standalone module on exactly that, and if this is your situation, that is the session to ask your leader for. Tonight settles only this much: home is where the first missionary in St. Mark's Gospel was sent.

SEND

- ▶ Who are "your friends" in the sense of Mark 5:19? Not your best friends. The people among whom you already live.
- ▶ What is your before and after? If someone who knew you five years ago asked what changed, what is the true answer?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 12 of the ladder. Go home. Tell somebody who knew you before.

- Keep praying for the three by name, daily.
- Tell one person who knew you before what the Lord has done for you. Not doctrine, not an invitation, and not an argument. The before and the after.
- Keep it to what they can verify. They watched the first half; that is your credential.
- If they laugh, or change the subject, or bring up something you did at twenty, let it go and stay in the room. Do not defend yourself.
- **Next week is the last session.** Bring your three names, written out again from memory if you have lost the sealed page.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, a man asked to come with you and you sent him home instead, and he went. Give us the grace to want the assignment we were given rather than the one we would have chosen. Send us to the people who remember us, and let what you have done in us be plain enough that we do not have to argue for it. And keep our joy where you put it: not in what we accomplish, but in the fact that you know our names. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

Mark 5:19

Leader Reference Card

Go Home to Your Friends

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

Passage	Where and why
Mark 5:1-20	Primary text. Read the pastoral note before reading it aloud.
Mark 3:14	Live discovery. That they might be with him, from Session 1.
Mark 6:1-6	Build 9, the objection at full strength. A prophet in his own country.
John 7:5	Build 9, the objection. His brothers did not believe in him.
Mark 7:31; Mark 8:1-9	Dig Deeper. Crowds in the Decapolis later, not asserted as a consequence.
Luke 10:1-20	Primary text. Read verses 1 to 11 and 17 to 20 aloud at minimum.
Acts 13:51	Build 7. The apostles shake the dust from their feet.
Numbers 6:24-26	Old Testament Roots. The priestly blessing behind "peace to this house."
Genesis 10	Dig Deeper. The table of nations, seventy or seventy.
Exodus 32:32-33; Psalm 69:28	Old Testament Roots. Names written in God's book.
Daniel 12:1; Malachi 3:16	Old Testament Roots. The book of remembrance.
Revelation 21:27	Dig Deeper. Where the book of names ends.

Leader Preparation Guide

You Will Be My Witnesses

Movement Five: Sending · Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:1-11; John 20:19-23

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover that all three sending texts hand over the same three things, an authority that is not ours, a task, and a presence; that the commission was given to a group St. Matthew says was worshipping and doubting at the same moment; and that among the last instructions before the Ascension was one to wait.

Catholic Touchstone

The Church exists in order to evangelize; that is her deepest identity. The commission names both sacrament and teaching, the power promised is the Holy Spirit rather than technique, and the presence promised has no end date.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This is a commissioning, not a normal session

Plan it differently. The teaching load is lighter than usual because almost nothing new is being introduced. What this session does is gather thirteen weeks and send people out of the room with something to keep doing.

The Commissioning section near the end is not optional and it is not a closing prayer. Protect twelve minutes for it.

Worship and doubt in the same sentence

Matthew 28:17: "And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted."

The verb is *distazō*, used only twice in the New Testament, here and at Matthew 14:31, where Jesus asks Peter why he doubted after pulling him out of the water. It carries the sense of wavering or hesitating rather than settled disbelief.

Be honest with the group about the Greek: the phrase can be read as "some of them doubted" or as "they hesitated," and translations differ. RSV2CE reads "but some doubted." Either way the fact stands, and it is the most encouraging sentence in the passage. The Great Commission was handed to a group that was, at that moment, partly wavering. Nobody in your room has to have finished doubting first.

One command, and what it rests on

Verse 18 first: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." The commission is grounded on his authority, not on the competence of the eleven. And notice that it is spoken of as given: the Father gives universal messianic authority to the incarnate Son within the economy of salvation, which says nothing against the Son's eternal equality with the Father.

Then the grammar of verses 19 and 20, which is worth being precise about. There is one main imperative: make disciples (*mathēteusate*). "Going," "baptizing," and "teaching" are participles hanging off it. The single command is make disciples, and the rest describes how it is done.

And what it is done with: baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. Sacrament and catechesis, named together, exactly as Sessions 7 and 11 found them. Not a selection of the commandments either: all of them.

The last words, which close a thread planted in the first session

"And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." *Meth' hymōn eimi*, I am with you.

Set the three passages side by side. In Mark 3:14 the Twelve were appointed to be **with him**, and to be sent out. In Mark 5:18 the healed man begged to be **with him**, and was refused and sent home. And here, at the sending, Jesus says **I am with you**, always.

The being with is not the thing you give up in order to be sent. It is what the sending is made of, and in the end he supplies it rather than us securing it. Get this out of the group in Build 4 rather than announcing it. It is the last movement of the study.

Acts 1: began, and wait

Verse 1: "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus **began** to do and teach." St. Luke calls his entire Gospel the beginning. Acts is what Jesus continued to do, through the Church.

Verse 4: he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father. After three years of formation, a crucifixion, and a resurrection, among his last instructions is one to do nothing yet.

Verse 6: "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Their question is still imperfectly framed at the very end. He does redirect it: it is not for them to know times and seasons, and he turns them toward the Spirit and worldwide witness.

Verse 8: "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." Note the verb: not you shall witness, but you shall **be** my witnesses. And note the geography St. Luke actually gives: Jerusalem, then all Judea and Samaria, then the end of the earth. The mapping onto where you are, your region, the people you would rather skip, and everywhere is our analogy rather than the verse's own meaning; Jerusalem was not the Galilean apostles' home.

Verses 10 and 11: two men in white ask why they are standing there looking into heaven. Even at the Ascension, somebody has to tell them to stop staring and get moving.

John 20: the wounds, the breath, and the confessional

The doors are shut for fear. He says "Peace be with you," and then shows them his hands and his side. He sends them with the wounds visible.

Verse 21: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." The measure of our sending is the Father's sending of the Son, which should be sobering rather than flattering.

Verse 22: he breathed on them. The Greek *enephyōsen* is the same verb the Septuagint uses at Genesis 2:7, when God breathes life into the man, and at Ezekiel 37:9, over the dry bones. This is new creation language and it is checkable.

Verse 23: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." In a Catholic study this must be named for what the Church teaches it to be: the institution of the sacrament of Reconciliation. See CCC 976, 1441-1442 and 1461.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Where "all authority" comes from

This is tonight's live discovery, so do not spend it. The passage is Daniel 7:13-14. Read it before the session with Matthew 28:18 in front of you.

To the end of the earth

Isaiah 49:6, where the Lord tells the servant that raising up the tribes of Jacob is too light a thing, and that he will give him as a light to the nations so that his salvation may reach to the end of the earth. St. Paul and Barnabas quote precisely this verse at Acts 13:47 when they turn to the Gentiles. Acts 1:8 is that promise being handed to the eleven.

Breath over the dead

Genesis 2:7 and Ezekiel 37:1-10. In Ezekiel the prophet is told to prophesy to the breath, and the breath comes into the slain and they live and stand on their feet, an exceedingly great host. John 20:22 uses the Septuagint's verb from both scenes.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope St. Paul VI on the Church's deepest identity

Evangelizing, Pope St. Paul VI wrote, is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.

He is not describing one department of parish life. He is saying that a Church which stopped doing this would not be a quieter Church; it would be a betrayal of what she is. Read it at the end of thirteen weeks and it lands differently than it would have in week one.

Pope St. Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi 14 (1975).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | The Second Vatican Council on where the mission comes from

The Council taught that the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, because she draws her origin from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit according to the plan of God the Father.

John 20:21 expresses one biblical dimension of that fuller Trinitarian teaching. The Church does not have a mission the way an organization has a strategy. She is downstream of a sending that started in God.

Second Vatican Council, Ad Gentes 2 (1965).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Thérèse of Lisieux, patroness of the missions from an enclosed Carmel

In the manuscript written for her sister, St. Thérèse describes wanting every vocation at once, missionary,

priest, apostle, martyr, and finding the answer in love: in the heart of the Church, her mother, she would be love.

She entered Carmel at fifteen and died at twenty-four, having lived her missionary vocation entirely from an enclosed Carmel and never served in a mission territory. The Church named her patroness of the missions. This is for anyone who has spent thirteen weeks quietly certain that the real work belongs to someone more capable.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, Manuscript B.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Great Commission appears in the second paragraph of the Catechism, before anything else is said about anything.

- **CCC 2.** The Catechism quotes Matthew 28:19-20 in its second paragraph, as the reason the call of Christ resounds through the world at all.
- **CCC 849.** The missionary mandate: the Church has been sent by God to the nations to be the universal sacrament of salvation.
- **CCC 730.** Christ breathes the Holy Spirit upon the apostles at John 20:22. For the Pentecost outpouring see CCC 731-732.
- **CCC 976.** The Creed links the forgiveness of sins with faith in the Holy Spirit, citing John 20:22-23.
- **CCC 1461.** Those who receive the sacrament of Holy Orders are the ministers of the sacrament of Reconciliation, on the basis of these verses.
- **CCC 1257.** God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, and God himself is not bound by his sacraments. Both halves, exactly as the Catechism states them, so that "baptizing them" is neither softened nor turned into a claim the Church does not make.
- Applying the concentric geography of Acts 1:8 to your own street is our extension of these paragraphs, not their wording.

THREAD WATCH

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Thread A, "With him, and sent," CLOSSES TONIGHT. Mark 3:14, appointed to be with him and to be sent. Mark 5:18, a man who asked to be with him and was sent home instead. Matthew 28:20, I am with you always. The being with was never the alternative to the sending, and in the end he supplies it. Build 4 is where this happens. Do not preach it; ask the question and wait.

Thread B. Resolved in Session 9. Tonight it appears once more in Acts 1:4, where the last order before the Ascension is to wait, and in Acts 1:8, where the power is named as the Spirit. You may point at it directly.

Thread C. Resolved in Session 8.

After tonight. Your group has nine sessions of practice behind them and no scheduled next week. The Commissioning section exists to give them one thing to keep and one person to hand this to. If you do nothing else in the last twenty minutes, do that.

The five modules. Tell the group they exist and what they cover, and offer to run whichever ones the group wants. The module on the people closest to you is the one most groups will ask for.

SESSION GOALS

1. Land Matthew 28:17 on the whole room: the commission was given to people who were worshiping and wavering at the same time.
2. Have the group find that there is one imperative in the commission, and that the rest is participles describing how.
3. Close Thread A out of the three texts, in the group's own words.
4. Establish that among the last instructions before the Ascension was one to wait, and that the power named is the Holy Spirit.
5. Name John 20:23 for what the Church has always understood it to be.
6. Have the group find Daniel 7:13-14 underneath "all authority."
7. Commission everyone by name, and send them out with one practice they will keep and one person they will hand this to.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:04	Opening prayer.
0:04-0:11	Field report on rung twelve, telling someone who knew you before.
0:11-0:17	Win questions.
0:17-0:23	Read all three passages aloud: Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:1-11, John 20:19-23.
0:23-0:33	Build 1 and 2, worship and doubt, and what the commission rests on.
0:33-0:41	Build 3, the one imperative.
0:41-0:49	Live discovery: Daniel 7 underneath "all authority."
0:49-0:58	Build 4, the close of Thread A. Give this its time and let the silence run.
0:58-1:08	Build 5 and 6, Acts 1 and John 20.
1:08-1:16	Build 7, the build-then-press on whether this was given to us at all.
1:16-1:28	The Commissioning. Twelve minutes, protected.
1:28-1:30	Closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Read Matthew 28:16-20 and Acts 1:1-11 aloud and summarize John 20:19-23 yourself, then read verses 21 to 23 alone. Saves four minutes.

- Run the Daniel discovery as a straight reading with one question. Saves five minutes.
- Fold Build 6 into Build 5 and handle John 20 in one pass. Saves six minutes.
- **Do not cut Build 4 or the Commissioning.** If you are over, cut Build 7 entirely; the objection is important and it is the only thing here that can wait.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

Somebody in your group has done every practice for twelve weeks and has nothing visible to show for it. Tonight is the night they are most likely to say so, or most likely to stay silent about it. Read Luke 10:20 from last week again if you need to, and make sure the Commissioning does not turn into a results report.

If the group wants to trade success stories, let it run briefly and then stop it deliberately. The person with nothing to report needs the last twenty minutes more than the person with something.

If someone treats tonight as the end, correct it gently and concretely: the daily prayer for three names does not have an end date, and that is the single practice to keep.

If the room is emotional, let it be. Do not manage it, and do not extend the session past ninety minutes to accommodate it. End on time and stay afterward.

Discussion Guide

You Will Be My Witnesses

Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:1-11; John 20:19-23

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thirteen weeks ago you called us to be with you, and tonight you send us out. We are not finished doubting and we are not finished changing, and you commissioned people like us on a mountain in Galilee anyway. Give us your Spirit, and go with us. Amen.

FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT | five minutes, no fixing

Seven minutes tonight, and take more people than usual.

Last week you told someone who knew you before what the Lord has done for you. How did that go?

Leader: make sure at least one person who has nothing to report gets to say so out loud, and receive it exactly as warmly as the good news. If nobody volunteers that, say it about yourself.

WIN

- ▶ Thirteen weeks ago you wrote three names. What has changed in you since then? Not in them.
- ▶ What is the hardest thing you have been asked to do in this study?

BUILD

Read all three passages aloud, in this order: Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:1-11, John 20:19-23. Ask the group to listen for what all three have in common, because the answer is the same three things every time.

1. Matthew 28:17. Two things happen in one verse. What are they?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They saw him, and they worshiped him. And "some doubted."

The Greek verb appears only twice in the New Testament: here, and at Matthew 14:31, where Jesus asks Peter why he doubted after hauling him out of the water. It means wavering or hesitating rather than settled unbelief.

Be honest about the translation. The phrase can be read as "some of them doubted" or as "they hesitated," and English versions differ. RSV2CE reads "but some doubted." Either way the fact stands.

The Great Commission was handed to a group that was worshiping and wavering in the same moment.

Nobody in this room has to have finished doubting before they are sent, and if you have been waiting for certainty, this verse ends the wait.

2. Verse 18. Before he commands anything, he says one thing. What does the commission rest on?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Everything that follows is grounded on his authority, not on the eleven's readiness, training, or nerve.

And notice the passive: it "has been given" to him. This is the Father giving universal messianic authority to the incarnate and risen Son in the economy of salvation, not a statement that the eternal Son acquired his divine authority.

The practical consequence for your group is direct. When you speak to one of your three, you are not asserting your own credibility. You have none to spend and you do not need any.

3. Verses 19 and 20. How many finite imperatives are there in this sentence? Look at the verbs carefully.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

One main finite imperative: make disciples. In the Greek, "going," "baptizing," and "teaching" are participles carrying out and specifying that mandate. Be careful not to imply that "go" lacks directive force: a participle in this construction commonly carries imperatival weight.

And how it happens is worth naming: baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that he has commanded. Sacrament and catechesis, together, which is exactly the pair Sessions 7 and 11 arrived at from different directions.

Note "all that I have commanded you." Not a curated selection, and not only the parts that go down easily.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Do not preview this. The echo is strong and most people have never seen it.

Have someone read Matthew 28:18 aloud again: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

Then have a second person read Daniel 7:13-14 aloud.

Then ask: what is given to the one like a son of man, and by whom, and for how long?

What they should find: in Daniel, one like a son of man comes with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days, and to him is given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him, and his dominion is everlasting and shall not pass away.

Then land it. The Great Commission opens by evoking that vision; it is a strong intertextual echo rather than a verbatim quotation. "Son of Man" is Jesus's own most frequent title for himself, and on the mountain in Galilee he tells the eleven that the thing Daniel saw given has been given. The command to go to all nations follows immediately, because Daniel already said all peoples and nations would serve him.

4. Verse 20, the last clause. Now turn back to Mark 3:14, and then Mark 5:18. Read all three aloud in that order. What just happened?

Leader: ask this and then be quiet. Do not help. This is the last movement of the study and the group has everything it needs to see it.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Mark 3:14: he appointed twelve to be **with him**, and to be sent out to preach. Mark 5:18: the healed man begged that he might be **with him**, and was refused and sent home. Matthew 28:20: "lo, **I am with you** always, to the close of the age."

The thing the Twelve were given, and the thing the Gerasene asked for and did not get, turns out to be the thing Christ promises to everyone he sends, permanently, in the last sentence of St. Matthew's Gospel.

Being with him was never the alternative to being sent. It is what the sending is made of. And in the end it is not something we secure by staying close. He supplies it, on the road, wherever we are sent.

Let the room sit in silence for a moment. Do not add anything to this.

5. Acts 1:1, and then verses 4 to 8. What does St. Luke call his entire Gospel? And what is the last instruction before the Ascension?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He calls it an account of all that Jesus **began** to do and teach. The whole Gospel is the beginning. Acts is what Jesus went on doing, through the Church, which means the book has never really closed.

And among his last instructions is the command to wait. Not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father. After three years of formation, a crucifixion, and a resurrection, the order is: do nothing yet.

Then verse 6: they ask whether he will now restore the kingdom to Israel. Their question is still imperfectly framed at the very end, and he redirects rather than simply leaving it: it is not for them to know times and seasons, and he turns them to what they will receive.

Verse 8: "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall **be** my witnesses." Not you shall witness. You shall be witnesses. It is an identity before it is an activity.

And the geography St. Luke gives is Jerusalem, then all Judea and Samaria, then the end of the earth. Reading that as where you are, your region, the people you would rather skip, and everywhere is an analogy of ours rather than the verse's meaning: Jerusalem was not the Galilean apostles' home. Samaria being third is the part worth sitting with.

6. John 20:19-23. What does he show them before he sends them, what does he breathe, and what does he give them at the end?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He shows them his hands and his side. The doors are shut for fear, he says "Peace be with you," and then he shows them the wounds. He sends them with the marks of what the sending costs still visible.

Verse 21 sets the measure: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." That is a sobering sentence rather than a flattering one.

Verse 22: he breathed on them. The Greek verb is the same one the Septuagint uses at Genesis 2:7, when God breathes life into the man, and at Ezekiel 37:9, over the dry bones. This is creation language, used deliberately.

Verse 23: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." The Church teaches that this is the institution of the sacrament of Reconciliation. See CCC 976 and 1461.

Put the three passages together: each one hands over an authority that is not ours, a task, and a presence. The three recur; do not press them into an identical order, since in John 20 the sending precedes the breathing and the authority to forgive follows it.

7. Someone says: the Great Commission was given to the apostles on a mountain, not to me. All this "every Catholic is a missionary" language flattens the difference between the ordained and the laity. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. Half of this is Catholic doctrine and must be conceded, and the conclusion still does not follow.

DIG DEEPER

"Christ has no body now but yours." Your group will meet this quotation, usually attributed to St. Teresa of Ávila, often on a parish bulletin. It is not found in her works and scholars regard it as a modern composition. The sentiment is defensible; the attribution is not. Use it as a live example of the discipline this study has been practicing all along: say what you know, at the strength you know it.

Why "wait"? Acts 1:4 has them told to wait for the promise, and Acts 2 is what they were waiting for. Between the Ascension and Pentecost, Acts shows them devoting themselves to prayer (1:14) and also acting: Peter addresses the brethren and Matthias is chosen (1:15-26). Any group leaving this study with a plan should notice where the plan starts.

The concentric circles. Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the end of the earth. Samaria is third, and it is the one nobody would have chosen. Session 4 was spent there.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it properly, because the first half is not a mistake. It is the Church's teaching.

The commission in Matthew 28 is given to the eleven. And it names baptizing and teaching, which in the ordinary course are done by the Church through her ministers. Verse 23 in John is more pointed still: the forgiveness and retention of sins is the sacrament of Reconciliation, and CCC 1461 is explicit that its ministers are those who have received Holy Orders.

The Church teaches that the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood differ in essence and not only in degree. That is not a matter of taste, and blurring it is a real error and not a generous one.

And there is a genuine failure mode. Parishes where everybody is a minister of something and nobody is actually pastored. Laypeople who take on functions that were never given to them, and who eventually burn out or do harm.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First: Acts 1:8. "You shall be my witnesses." Acts 1:8 is addressed to the apostolic eyewitnesses, so do not rest the argument there. Rest it on baptism and confirmation, on CCC 900, which says the laity have the obligation and the right to work so that the message of salvation is known and accepted, and on the Council's teaching that the laity are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself and not by delegation from the hierarchy.

Second, and this settles it: turn to Acts 8:1-4. After the persecution, St. Luke says they were all scattered throughout Judea and Samaria **except the apostles**. And then, verse 4: those who were scattered went about preaching the word. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem. The preaching went out through everyone else.

Third: Acts 11:19-21. Those same scattered people reached Antioch, spoke to Greeks, and "a great number that believed turned to the Lord." One of the earliest major Gentile Christian communities was formed through people St. Luke does not bother to name. Cornelius's household comes earlier, in Acts 10, so avoid the flat superlative. The apostles arrive later to see what happened.

Fourth: the Church says so herself. CCC 900 states that the laity have the obligation and the right to work so that the message of salvation is known and accepted, and the Council teaches that the laity are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself rather than by delegation from the hierarchy.

Now concede everything that should be conceded, and be precise. You cannot ordinarily baptize. You cannot absolve. You cannot consecrate. The ministerial priesthood differs from the common priesthood in essence. None of that is a limitation this study wants to talk you out of; it is exactly why Session 10 insisted that you hand people to the Church rather than to yourself.

The commission does not make you a priest. It makes you the person who brings somebody to one.

SEND

- ▶ What is the one practice from these thirteen weeks that you are actually going to keep?
- ▶ Who are you going to hand this to?

THE COMMISSIONING

THE COMMISSIONING | twelve minutes, everybody says the same amount

This is the Commissioning. Twelve minutes, and do not let it be rushed or turned into a results report.

One. Ask everyone to write their three names down one more time, on a fresh piece of paper, from memory. Some names will have changed since week one. That is fine and worth noticing silently.

Two. Go around the room. Each person says either their three names out loud, or simply "three people," whichever they prefer. Say the option before you begin, and mean it. Nobody explains, nobody comments, and nobody prays over anyone else's names out loud.

Three. Then ask each person for two sentences only: the one practice they are keeping, and the name of the person they are handing this study to. The practice most of them should keep is the daily prayer by name, because it is the one rung of the ladder with no end date on it.

Four. Tell them plainly what happens now. There is no session next week. The three names do not expire. The five modules exist and you will run any of them the group asks for, and the one on the people closest to you is the one most groups want.

Five. Close by praying over the group, out loud, by name if you can. Then read Matthew 28:20 one final time and stop talking.

Leader guidance. If someone has nothing to report and no visible fruit, this is the moment they are most exposed. Make sure the format protects them: two sentences each, no explanations, no stories. Everyone leaves having said the same amount.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

Rung 13 of the ladder. There is no rung fourteen, and that is the point. The ladder was never a course; it was a description of an ordinary Christian life.

- **Keep praying for the three by name, daily.** This is the one thing not to stop. It has no end date and no completion criterion.
- Keep saying your one sentence. You will get better at it and it will change over time.
- Go back to whichever rung you skipped or fumbled. Most people know which one it was.
- Hand this study to the person you named tonight. Give them your take-homes if that helps.
- Ask your leader about the five standalone modules. The one on the people closest to you is the one most groups want.
- And when somebody says yes, remember Session 10: take them somewhere, walk in with them, and hand them to the Church rather than to yourself.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you stood on a mountain with eleven men who were worshipping you and doubting at the same time, and you sent them to the ends of the earth. Send us. Give us your Spirit, because we have no power of our own and we have stopped pretending otherwise. Keep our joy where you put it. And go with us, as you promised, all the days, to the close of the age. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

Matthew 28:20

Leader Reference Card

You Will Be My Witnesses

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

Passage	Where and why
Matthew 28:16-20	Primary text, read aloud in full.
Matthew 14:31	Build 1. The only other use of the verb for doubting.
Mark 3:14	Build 4. Appointed to be with him, from Session 1.
Mark 5:18	Build 4. The healed man asks to be with him, from Session 12.
Daniel 7:13-14	Live discovery. The one like a son of man, to whom dominion is given.
Acts 1:1-11	Primary text. Began, wait, receive power, be witnesses.
Acts 1:14	Dig Deeper. Ten days of prayer between the commission and the first sermon.
Acts 8:1-4	Build 7, the press. All scattered except the apostles, and those scattered preached.
Acts 11:19-21	Build 7, the press. The first Gentile church, founded by unnamed people.
John 20:19-23	Primary text. The wounds, the breath, and the forgiveness of sins.
Genesis 2:7; Ezekiel 37:1-10	Old Testament Roots. The Septuagint verb behind John 20:22.
Isaiah 49:6; Acts 13:47	Old Testament Roots. A light to the nations, to the end of the earth.
Luke 10:20	Leader notes. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven, from Session 12.

Your Story in Three Minutes

Standalone Practicum Module · Acts 22:1-21; Acts 26:1-29; Galatians 1:11-24

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover, by putting St. Paul's three tellings of his own conversion side by side, that a testimony has a stable shape, that the details change with the audience, that Paul is markedly selective, and that it lands on Christ rather than on the speaker. Then have everyone in the room write and say their own.

Catholic Touchstone

The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of evangelization, and a testimony is an account of what God did rather than a report on one's own spiritual progress. This module is a practicum: two thirds of the time is people writing and speaking, not discussing.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

How to run this one

This module is different from the core sessions. The Build section is short and the practicum is long. Plan for roughly thirty-five minutes of study and forty-five minutes of writing, saying, and hearing.

You will need paper, pens, and a timer. Do not skip the timer; the whole exercise turns on three minutes being a hard limit.

It works best after Session 6, and it is the natural companion to the rung six practice where people wrote their "one thing I know" sentence. If your group has done that, this module expands the sentence into a story. If they have not, this module can stand entirely on its own.

Paul tells it three times, and never the same way twice

St. Luke narrates the conversion in Acts 9, and Paul tells it himself twice: to a hostile Jerusalem crowd in Acts 22, and to King Agrippa in Acts 26. St. Paul tells it a fourth time, compressed almost to nothing, in Galatians 1.

The shape is the same every time: what he was before, what happened, and what he was sent to do afterward. Before, encounter, commission.

Everything else moves. The details, the register, the length, and the emphasis all shift with the room, and the shifts are not evasions. They are attention.

Acts 22: common ground first, and the sentence that lost the room

He speaks in Hebrew, and St. Luke notes that the crowd became more quiet when they heard it (22:2). Before any content, he chose the language that told them he was one of them.

Then he establishes common ground at length: a Jew, born in Tarsus, brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, "being zealous for God as you all are this day." He identifies with them before he differs from them.

Then he names his own guilt plainly: he persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women. No softening and no excuse.

And notice how he describes Ananias (22:12): a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews living there. In Acts 9 that detail is absent. Here it is the detail that will land, so it is the one he gives.

The crowd listens all the way to verse 21, "I will send you far away to the Gentiles," and then erupts. He lost the room at the one point he could not leave out.

Acts 26: a completely different register, same story

Before Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus, the opening is courtly: "I think myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defense today." He appeals to Agrippa's knowledge of Jewish customs and controversies.

He frames the whole thing as a question about hope: he stands on trial "for hope in the promise made by God to our fathers." And then, to that assembly, "Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?"

Festus interrupts and calls him mad. Paul answers without heat: "I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth."

And then the ending, which is one of the great sentences in Scripture. Agrippa says, "In a short time you think to make me a Christian!" And Paul: "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am, except for these chains."

He wants his hearers to have exactly what he has, except for his chains. Read that aloud and let it sit. It is the test of whether a testimony is really about Christ or about the speaker.

What he does not do

He does not make his sins the centre. He names them candidly and moves on, and where the room calls for it he gives real detail: Acts 26:9-11 runs to several clauses. What he never does is linger on them or make them the subject.

He does not describe his feelings. There is no account of what the experience was like inside him.

He does not make himself the hero of a journey. In the encounter itself the verbs belong to someone else: a light shone, a voice spoke, I was told, I was sent. His own response is active, though: Acts 26:19-20 has him not disobedient, and declaring.

And he does not end on himself. Each account carries the sending, and each ends on what God is doing rather than on what happened to Paul.

These four omissions are the whole practicum. Most people's first draft violates all four.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Testimony as an Israelite practice

Psalms 66:16: "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me." Psalm 107:2: "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble." The instruction to say out loud what God has done is old, and in the Psalms it is a public act rather than a private reflection.

The pattern under Paul's telling

Several of these accounts echo the shape of the prophetic call: an encounter and a sending, with an objection or a fall in some of them. Compare Isaiah 6:1-8 and Jeremiah 1:4-10. If your group has done Session 8, they have already found this pattern and can name it themselves.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine, whose *Confessions* is one of the most influential conversion narratives in Christian literature

The *Confessions* is a conversion story, and its most striking feature is grammatical: the whole book is addressed to God rather than to the reader. Augustine is not narrating his journey to an audience; he is telling God what God did, out loud, and letting us listen.

That is the discipline this module is teaching in miniature. When the second person of a testimony is God rather than the hearer, the story stops being about the speaker without anyone having to be told to be humble.

St. Augustine, Confessions. Work-level citation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Cyprian, on what he thought was impossible

Writing to his friend Donatus shortly after his own baptism, St. Cyprian describes in substance how he had believed that the change being asked of him was simply not achievable for a man of his habits, and how, after the water of new birth, what had seemed impossible began to be possible.

It is an early Christian first-person account of conversion, and it is short. Notice what he emphasizes: not his own effort, and not the drama of his former life, but the fact that something worked which he had been certain would not.

St. Cyprian of Carthage, summarized from To Donatus. A faithful summary, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Paul II on the first form of witness

St. John Paul II wrote that the witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission, and that the modern world listens to a life before it listens to an argument.

Note the word irreplaceable. Not sufficient, which he says elsewhere, and not optional either. Your testimony is not a substitute for content, and no amount of content substitutes for it.

St. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio 42 (1990).

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Church treats personal witness as a duty of the baptized rather than a gift some people happen to have.

- **CCC 905.** Lay people fulfill their prophetic mission by proclaiming Christ in the testimony of life and in the spoken word.
- **CCC 2471.** Christ came into the world to bear witness to the truth, and the Christian is not to be ashamed of testifying to the Lord.

- **CCC 2472.** Bearing witness to the Gospel in words and deeds is a transmission of the faith.
- **CCC 425.** The transmission of the faith consists primarily in proclaiming Jesus Christ, in order to lead others to faith in him.
- Using a three minute time limit is our practical device, not anything the Catechism prescribes.

LEADER NOTES

THREAD WATCH | leader only

This is a standalone module. It carries none of the core study's threads and gives nothing away. It can be run before, during, or after the thirteen sessions, or entirely on its own with a group that has never met the core study.

If you are running it inside the core study, it fits most naturally after Session 6, whose practice was to write a single sentence beginning "One thing I know." This module expands that sentence.

Protect the practicum. The temptation is to let the Build discussion run long because it is more comfortable than making people write. Do not. The forty-five minutes of writing and speaking is the module; the study is the setup.

Watch for. Somebody in the room converted quietly, gradually, or as an infant, and has concluded they have no story. Read the guidance in Practicum Step Two before you begin, and make sure that person hears it.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group find the stable shape across Paul's tellings: before, encounter, commission.
2. Have them find, by direct comparison, which details change with the audience and why.
3. Name the four things St. Paul does not do, and get them into everyone's draft.
4. Have every person in the room write a three minute testimony.
5. Have every person say it out loud to at least one other human being, timed.
6. Send everyone home with a version that has been said twice and cut once.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer and explain the shape of the evening. Say up front that most of tonight is writing and speaking.
0:05-0:11	Win questions.
0:11-0:17	Read Acts 22:1-21 aloud.
0:17-0:27	Build 1 and 2, the shape and the common ground.
0:27-0:39	Live discovery: Acts 22 and Acts 26 side by side.
0:39-0:45	Build 3, what St. Paul does not do. Write the four omissions where everyone can see them.

Minutes	Movement
0:45-1:00	Practicum step one: write. Fifteen minutes of silence.
1:00-1:15	Practicum step two: say it. In pairs, timed, three minutes each, then swap.
1:15-1:20	Practicum step three: cut. Five minutes alone with the draft.
1:20-1:26	Practicum step four: the leader goes last. Say yours to the room, timed, and let them stop you at three minutes.
1:26-1:30	Build 4, the objection, in brief. Take-homes and closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Read only Acts 22:1-16 aloud and summarize the ending yourself. Saves five minutes.
- Run the discovery with the leader reading the two openings rather than the group comparing whole passages. Saves seven minutes.
- Drop Build 4 entirely and put the objection on the take-home. Saves five minutes.
- **Never cut the practicum.** If you are badly over time, cut everything before it and run the module as forty-five minutes of writing and speaking with a five minute setup. It still works.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

Somebody will say they have no story because they were baptized as an infant and never left. That is a real and common situation and it is not a deficiency. Their baptism was a real rescue; it was simply not a story they remember. What they are being asked for is the answer to "what difference does this actually make to how you live," which is often harder to say and lands harder when said. Have that sentence ready before anyone raises it.

If someone's draft is mostly about a person who hurt them, redirect gently and privately, not in front of the group. A testimony that requires a villain is not finished, and a testimony that names a living person to a room is a problem.

If someone discloses something serious while writing or speaking, receive it, do not process it in the room, and follow up during the week. This exercise surfaces things.

Do not correct anyone's theology in the practicum unless it is genuinely wrong rather than merely imprecise. Tonight is about getting people to speak at all.

Discussion Guide

Your Story in Three Minutes

Acts 22:1-21; Acts 26:1-29; Galatians 1:11-24

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you have done something in each of us, and most of us have never once said it out loud in an orderly way. Give us honesty about what you actually did, restraint about what we did, and the courage to say it to someone this week. Amen.

WIN

- ▶ Has anyone ever told you their conversion story? What do you remember about it?
- ▶ What makes you stop listening when somebody talks about their faith?

BUILD

Read Acts 22:1-21 aloud. This is St. Paul speaking to a crowd in Jerusalem that had just tried to kill him, so read it as a man talking a hostile room down rather than as a devotional passage.

1. Acts 22:1-21. Break the speech into three parts. Where does each one start and stop?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Before: verses 3 to 5. Who he was, how he was raised, what he did to Christians.

Encounter: verses 6 to 16. The road, the light, the voice, the blindness, Ananias, and the washing away of sins.

Temple vision and objection: verses 17 to 20, where he is praying in the temple and raises his own past as an objection. Commission: verse 21, the command to go far away to the Gentiles.

Before, encounter, commission. That is the shape, and it holds in every telling. Write it where the group can see it, because everyone is going to use it in an hour.

2. Look at how the speech opens, in verses 2 and 3. What does he do before he says anything about Jesus?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He speaks in Hebrew, and St. Luke tells us the crowd quieted down when they heard it. Before any content at all, he chose the language that said he was one of them.

Then he spends a full verse on common ground: a Jew, born in Tarsus, brought up in this city, taught by Gamaliel, educated in the strict manner of the law of our fathers, "being zealous for God as you all are this

day."

He identifies with them before he differs from them, and the identification is true rather than tactical. He really was all those things.

Then, immediately: "I persecuted this Way to the death." He names his own guilt in one clause, without softening it and without dwelling on it.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Send them to compare. This is the most useful twelve minutes in the module.

Split the room. Half reads Acts 22:1-21, the other half reads Acts 26:1-23. Give them five minutes.

Then ask three questions in order. What is in both? What is only in one? And why?

What they should find. In both: before, encounter, commission, and an encounter with the living Jesus. Note the difference: Acts 26 explicitly argues the resurrection, while Acts 22 presupposes it in the appearance. Only in Acts 22: the Hebrew language, Gamaliel, the temple vision, and Ananias described as a devout man according to the law who was well spoken of by all the Jews there. Only in Acts 26: the courtly opening to a king, the appeal to Agrippa's knowledge of Jewish customs, the saying about kicking against the goads, and the framing of the whole case as being about hope in the promise made to the fathers.

The why is the lesson. To a Jewish crowd he emphasizes that Ananias was law observant, because that is what makes the story credible to them. To the hearing before Festus and Agrippa he opens with deference and argues from hope and from the prophets, because that is the room he is in. The story never changes. The doors into it do.

Then read Acts 26:28-29 aloud yourself. Agrippa says, "In a short time you think to make me a Christian!" And Paul answers: "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am, except for these chains." Ask the group what that sentence reveals about who the testimony was for.

3. Now the negative list. Across both speeches, name four things St. Paul does not do.

Leader: write these four on a board or a sheet. Everyone will check their own draft against them in forty minutes.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He does not dwell on his sins. "I persecuted this Way to the death" is one clause, and it is the whole of it. No detail, no inventory, and no lingering.

He does not describe his feelings. There is no account anywhere of what the experience was like inside him. Given that he was knocked to the ground and blinded, that is a remarkable omission.

He does not make himself the hero. In the encounter itself the verbs belong to someone else: a light shone, a voice spoke, I was told, I was sent. He is not passive throughout, and should not be made so: at Acts 26:19-20 he says he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision and that he declared the message. Divine initiative governs the story, and his own response is real.

He does not end on himself. Each account carries the sending, and each ends on what God is doing rather than on Paul. Do not say every telling ends on the commission: Acts 9 runs on past it, and Galatians 1 ends

with the churches glorifying God.

Most first drafts break all four. That is normal and it is what the practicum is for.

4. Someone says: my story is boring. I was baptized as a baby, I never left, nothing dramatic ever happened. I have nothing to tell. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

No, and the correction matters enough to say plainly.

A testimony need not be a dramatic adult rescue narrative, and it is not a before and after photograph. Say the first part carefully: their baptism genuinely rescued them from sin and gave them new life; what they lack is a story they remember, not the thing itself. It is an answer to the question of what difference Jesus Christ actually makes to how you live, and that question is harder for the cradle Catholic, not easier.

The person who left and came back has a story with a shape built in. The person who never left has to do the harder work of noticing what has been quietly true, and when they do it well it lands harder, because it cannot be dismissed as a phase or a crisis.

Practical version for the practicum: this person can write "what I was handed, what I came to own, and what I do about it now" -- offered as one possible framework rather than a formula, since not everyone can name a moment when it became theirs. Same three part shape, different content.

SEND

- ▶ Which of St. Paul's four omissions is going to be hardest for you?
- ▶ Who is the specific person your three minutes is for? Write their name at the top of the page.

PRACTICUM

PRACTICUM | write it, say it, cut it

PRACTICUM. This is the module. Roughly forty minutes, and do not let it get compressed.

Step one: write. Fifteen minutes of silence.

Three paragraphs, on paper, in the shape you found in Acts 22. What I was. What happened. What I do now.

Rules for this draft, taken from the four omissions. These are constraints for the exercise rather than laws of Christian testimony: keep your sins brief and never let them become the subject, keep description of your own feelings out of this draft, give God the active verbs, and end on what he is doing now rather than on you.

If you were baptized as an infant and never left, one workable shape is: what I was handed, what I came to own, and what I do about it now. Your baptism was a real rescue; you simply do not remember it.

Write the name of one real person at the top of the page first. You are writing it for them, not for the room.

Step two: say it. Fifteen minutes, in pairs, timed.

Three minutes each, strictly timed, then swap. The listener does not respond, does not ask questions, and does not compliment. When the timer stops, the listener says one thing only: the sentence that landed

hardest.

If a person runs out of material at ninety seconds, that is fine. If they run over three minutes, the timer stops them mid sentence, and that is the most useful thing that will happen to them tonight.

Step three: cut. Five minutes alone.

Go back to your page and remove the self-display. Not everything about yourself: your real response to grace belongs in the story. What goes is anything that is there to make you look good. Then remove the second best sentence in it. Almost every testimony is improved by being shorter and by losing its cleverest line.

Step four: the leader goes last, and goes first among equals. Say yours, timed, to the whole room, and let them stop you at three minutes. Do not exempt yourself.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

This week. A story that has never been said out loud to anyone who was not in this room is still a draft.

- Say it to one person outside this group this week. Not as an announcement; when the conversation makes room for it.
- Say it under three minutes. Time yourself beforehand if you have to.
- Do not add anything to the end. For this week, no invitation, no question, no verse. That is a training constraint and not a rule: Paul himself asks Agrippa a direct question at Acts 26:27. The constraint exists so you learn to let a silence be someone else's.
- Afterward, write down which sentence you wanted to add and did not. That sentence is usually the one that is about you.
- Rewrite it once more in a month. It will have changed, and it should.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you have done something in each of us that is worth saying out loud, and most of us have been quiet about it for years. Give us words that are true, short, and about you. And give us one person this week who will hear them. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me."

Psalm 66:16

MODULE 1 | PART THREE

Leader Reference Card

Your Story in Three Minutes

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

Passage	Where and why
Acts 22:1-21	Primary text, read aloud. Paul to a hostile Jerusalem crowd.
Acts 26:1-23	Live discovery. Paul before King Agrippa.
Acts 26:28-29	Live discovery, read aloud by the leader. "Except for these chains."
Acts 9:1-22	Leader prep. St. Luke's own narration, for comparison.
Galatians 1:11-24	Leader prep. The same story compressed, told for a different purpose.
Psalms 66:16	Memory verse and Old Testament Roots. I will tell what he has done for me.
Psalms 107:2	Old Testament Roots. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.
Isaiah 6:1-8; Jeremiah 1:4-10	Old Testament Roots. The prophetic call pattern under Paul's telling.

Leader Preparation Guide

A Prophet Without Honor

Standalone Practicum Module: The People Closest to You · Mark 6:1-6; John 7:1-5; Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 7:12-16; 1 Peter 3:1-2

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover what Scripture actually reports about the hardest room in Christianity, including the fact that the Lord's own relatives did not believe him during his ministry and are found praying with the Church after the Resurrection. Then find the specific instructions Scripture gives for a household divided about faith, and the one it does not give.

Catholic Touchstone

The family is the domestic church, and household division is not by itself proof of failure or unfaithfulness. And no one is obliged to remain in grave danger: that is the first thing to say out loud in this module and not the last.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Read this whole guide before you run this module

This is the module most groups ask for, and it is the one most likely to draw out something painful. Somebody in the room has a child who has left, a spouse who does not believe, or a parent they have not spoken to about anything real in a decade.

Two safety notes are non-negotiable and both appear in the discussion guide. Give them in the room, out loud, at the points marked. Do not assume they are obvious.

The module ends with a practicum that asks people to stop doing something rather than start doing something. That is deliberate. Most people in this room have been trying harder for years.

Nazareth: what actually went wrong

Mark 6:1-6. He teaches in the synagogue and they are astonished, and then the astonishment curdles: where did this man get all this, is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him.

The problem was not that they knew too little about him. It was that they knew a version of him that had no room for this. Familiarity did not produce contempt so much as a fixed category.

And then the two sentences that make this the objection everyone raises: "he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief." St. Mark records his marvelling only here; the scene of Jesus marvelling at faith belongs to St. Matthew and St. Luke.

Note the exception clause, which people skip. Even in the worst reported room in the Gospels, he healed a few people. It was not nothing; it was less.

The brothers and sisters, handled properly

Your group will ask, and if you do not raise it, someone with a Protestant friend will. Handle it carefully and honestly rather than defensively.

The Church holds the perpetual virginity of Mary (CCC 499-501), and understands these as kinsmen rather than uterine siblings. The case rests on convergence, not on a single knockdown argument, and you should present it that way.

One: the Greek *adelphos* alone does not settle it. In the Septuagint it regularly renders a Hebrew word covering a wide kinship range, and Genesis 13:8 calls Abraham and Lot brothers when they were uncle and nephew. **Two, the one most often cited:** Mark 6:3 names James and Joses among the brothers, and Mark 15:40 names "Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses" among the women at the cross. It is checkable, and it is cumulative rather than decisive: Mark does not identify her as a different Mary. **Three:** at John 19:26-27 Jesus entrusts his mother to a disciple, which would be difficult to explain if she had other sons alive.

Be honest about the limits. None of the three is decisive on its own, and a fair-minded Protestant can push on each. The Catholic position rests on the convergence together with the constant witness of the Church, which for a Catholic is definitive rather than probable. Say all of that plainly and move on; this module is not the place to fight it out, and the apologetics course exists for people who want to.

His own relatives did not believe him

John 7:1-5. His brethren tell him to leave Galilee and go to Judea and show himself to the world, "for no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly." It reads as goading rather than support. And St. John states it flatly in verse 5: "For even his brethren did not believe in him."

Mark 3:21 is harder still: his own people went out to seize him, amid talk that he was beside himself. The Greek is genuinely disputed over who voiced it, so present it carefully.

Give this to your group early, plainly, and without softening it. The sinless Son of God had relatives who mocked him and relatives who thought he needed to be taken home.

And then, what happened to them

This is the live discovery and the whole hope of the module, so do not spend it here. The trail runs John 7:5, then Acts 1:14, then 1 Corinthians 15:7, then Galatians 1:19.

What it costs to say in advance: it took the Resurrection. Nothing less moved them, and no argument any of them heard during the ministry did it. If your people leave with one thing, let it be that the change they are praying for may require something they cannot supply, and that this is not a reason to stop.

The two instructions Scripture actually gives, and the one it does not

1 Corinthians 7:12-16. If a believer has an unbelieving spouse who consents to live with them, they should not divorce. The unbelieving spouse is consecrated through the believing one. And verse 16: "Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?"

Be honest about verse 16: interpreters divide on whether it is hopeful (you may yet save them, so stay) or cautionary (you cannot know, so do not stay on that basis alone). RSV2CE leaves the ambiguity standing. Give the group both readings. The Catechism cites this passage on marriage with disparity of cult at CCC 1637.

1 Peter 3:1-2. Some who do not obey the word may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see reverent and chaste behavior.

Read the safety note in the discussion guide before you touch this passage. This text is about witness inside a difficult marriage. It is not counsel to remain in a dangerous one, and it has been misused that way. The Church makes provision for this: CCC 1649 permits physical separation where common life becomes practically impossible, with the marriage bond remaining, and canon 1153 names grave danger of soul or body as a legitimate cause for one spouse to leave. Say that out loud, in the room, before you discuss the verse.

Safeguarding, and this part is not optional. Where a disclosure concerns a minor or a vulnerable adult, or where there is any sign of present danger, follow civil law and your diocesan safeguarding policy, including mandatory reporting where it applies. Do not promise confidentiality you cannot keep. Do not investigate or adjudicate disputed detail. Where there is immediate risk, act now rather than in the week, involving emergency or clinical help as warranted. Know your diocesan safeguarding and victim assistance contacts before you lead this.

And the instruction Scripture does not give: silence as a policy. Notice what 1 Peter 3:1 actually says, that these are people who "do not obey the word." The word had been spoken. This is guidance about what wins someone who has already heard and declined, not a rule against ever speaking.

Jesus expected this

Luke 12:51-53: do you think I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division, and he names it household by household, father against son and mother against daughter.

He is not commending division and he is not commanding it. He is telling his disciples in advance that it will happen. Read alongside Matthew 10:34-36, these warnings can keep a person from assuming that conflict at home means they failed; they do not settle any particular case. Anyone in your group carrying guilt about a divided family should hear this verse said out loud by somebody other than themselves.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Prophets and their households

Jeremiah 12:6: "For even your brothers and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you." Joseph, in Genesis 37, is given dreams and his brothers hate him for telling them. The Old Testament assumes that the household is a hard audience for anyone carrying a word.

The one who could not be talked into it

1 Samuel 3 has Eli, a priest, unable to change his own sons, and 1 Samuel 2:22-25 says plainly that he spoke to them and they would not listen. Scripture records a priest and father who warned his sons and is judged for failing to restrain them: 1 Samuel 2:29 says he honoured his sons above God, and 3:13 condemns the failure to restrain. It does not blame him for their free refusal, and it does not call him blameless either. Handle this one carefully; it cuts both ways and it will land on parents in your room.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine on his mother, and a caution about how to read it

In the Confessions, St. Augustine describes his mother's conduct toward his father, a man of considerable temper and unfaithfulness. He records that she bore with him, chose her moments, never confronted him

while he was angry, and that in the end he was baptized before he died. Augustine offers her as an example to other wives.

Read that with two things held together. Her patience was real and it was not passivity, and it belongs to the same family of witness as 1 Peter 3:1. And the Church today is clear, as she should be, that nobody is obliged to endure danger, and that separation is legitimate where there is harm. Do not take a fourth century marriage as a template for a twenty-first century one that is unsafe.

St. Augustine, Confessions, Book IX. Book-level citation; no chapter number given.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | The Second Vatican Council on the domestic church

The Council taught that the family is, so to speak, the domestic church, and that in it parents should be the first preachers of the faith to their children by word and by example.

Note the order the Council uses, and note also what it does not say. It says parents are the first preachers. It does not say they are the last, or the only, or that the outcome rests on them.

Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium 11 (1964).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Paul II on the family that evangelizes

In his apostolic exhortation on the Christian family, St. John Paul II taught in substance that the Christian family is not only evangelized but itself evangelizes, and that its first and most immediate field of mission is its own members.

He is careful about a point that matters in this room: the family evangelizes by what it is before it evangelizes by what it says. Which does not mean it never says anything, and this module will press on that.

St. John Paul II, summarized from Familiaris Consortio (1981). Document-level citation; no paragraph number given.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

Four of these paragraphs are pastoral rather than doctrinal, and you should have all four within reach when you run this module.

- **CCC 499-501.** The perpetual virginity of Mary, and the Church's understanding of the brothers and sisters of Jesus as close relations.
- **CCC 1655-1657.** The family as the domestic church. **CCC 1658** is a distinct subject: the Church's care for those who are single or without a human family.
- **CCC 1637.** Marriage with disparity of cult, citing 1 Corinthians 7:14 on the sanctification of the unbelieving spouse.
- **CCC 1649.** Separation is permitted where common life becomes practically impossible, and the marriage bond remains. For the danger case specifically, see canon 1153. Have both ready before you begin.
- **CCC 2226.** Parents have the mission of educating their children in the faith, beginning in early childhood.
- Applying any of this to a specific relative at a specific Christmas is our extension, not the Catechism's wording.

LEADER NOTES

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Standalone module. It carries none of the core study's threads. It can be run at any point, and it is frequently the first thing a group asks for after Session 12.

Two safety notes are mandatory and marked in the discussion guide. The first concerns 1 Peter 3:1 and danger in marriage. The second concerns not treating anyone's absent family member as a case study in front of the room. Give both.

Expect silence. This module produces more quiet than any other. Let it. Do not fill it, and do not call on anyone.

The practicum asks people to stop something rather than start something. Almost everyone in the room has been trying harder for years, and the useful intervention is subtraction. Do not let the group turn it into a new plan.

Know your parish resources before you walk in: confession times, the OCIA contact, and whether your diocese has a marriage or family counseling referral. You may need one of the three by the end of the evening.

SESSION GOALS

1. Establish from Mark 6 and John 7 that the Lord himself had a hard room at home, and that Scripture reports it without embarrassment.
2. Handle the brothers and sisters question honestly, with the strongest argument given and its limits admitted.
3. Have the group trace what became of his relatives, and see what it took.
4. Give both readings of 1 Corinthians 7:16 rather than picking one.
5. Give the safety note on 1 Peter 3:1 clearly and early, and then find what the verse actually says about the word having been spoken.
6. Work the objection that one should never speak to family about faith.
7. Send everyone home having identified one thing to stop doing for ninety days.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer and the second safety note about not discussing anyone's named relatives.
0:05-0:12	Win questions.
0:12-0:24	Read Mark 6:1-6 and John 7:1-5 aloud. Build 1.
0:24-0:32	Build 2, the brothers and sisters, handled and closed.
0:32-0:42	Live discovery: what became of them.
0:42-0:54	Build 3 and 4, the two instructions, with the safety note before 1 Peter.
0:54-1:02	Build 5, Luke 12:51-53.

Minutes	Movement
1:02-1:14	Build 6, the build-then-press on never speaking to family.
1:14-1:26	Practicum: the ninety day subtraction.
1:26-1:30	Take-homes and closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Handle the brothers and sisters question in ninety seconds yourself and point people to the apologetics course. Saves seven minutes and is a reasonable cut, since it is not what the module is for.
- Drop Build 5; the take-home recap already carries Luke 12:51-53. Saves eight minutes, though it is the verse that lifts guilt off parents.
- Read only Mark 6:1-6 aloud and summarize John 7. Saves four minutes.
- **Do not cut the live discovery or the practicum.** The discovery is the only hope in the module and the practicum is the only action.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

Give this note before the session begins, in these words or close to them: tonight we are going to talk about people who are not here and cannot answer for themselves. Speak about your own conduct rather than theirs, do not name anyone, and do not describe anybody's sins to this room.

If someone begins describing a family member's life in detail, interrupt kindly and redirect to what they themselves have been doing. That is not censorship; it is protecting an absent person who has no voice here.

If anything in the room suggests danger at home, stop treating it as a study question. Do not offer counsel. Tell them privately afterward that no one is obliged to remain in danger, that the Church says so explicitly, and help them contact your parish or diocesan resource. Know it before you walk in.

If a parent says outright that their child's loss of faith is their fault, do not rush to reassure them, and do not agree either. Read Luke 12:51-53 and then 1 Samuel 2:22-25, and let them see that Scripture holds both realism and mercy. Follow up in the week.

If the group turns tonight into strategy for a specific upcoming holiday, slow them down. Ninety days of subtraction first.

Discussion Guide

A Prophet Without Honor

Mark 6:1-6; John 7:1-5; Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 7:12-16; 1 Peter 3:1-2

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, your own relatives thought you had lost your mind, and your neighbors could not get past knowing your mother's name. You know exactly what this room is carrying. Give us patience that is not cowardice and honesty that is not force, and be at work in the people we cannot reach. Amen.

WIN

- ▶ What does your family think you are like? Not what you are like. What is the version of you they have on file?
- ▶ When has someone close to you changed in a way you did not believe was possible?

BUILD

Before we read: tonight we will talk about people who are not in this room and cannot answer for themselves. Speak about your own conduct rather than theirs. Do not use names, and do not describe anybody's sins to this group. Now read Mark 6:1-6 aloud, and then John 7:1-5.

1. Mark 6:1-6. They are astonished at first. What turns the astonishment into offense? And read verse 5 carefully, including the exception.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

What turns it is the list: is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and are not his brothers and sisters here with us? They had a fixed category for him and this did not fit in it. The problem was not that they knew too little. It was that they knew a version of him with no room for this.

Then verse 5: "he could do no mighty work there, **except** that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them." People skip the exception. Even in the worst room reported in the Gospels, a few people were healed. Not nothing. Less.

And verse 6: "he marveled because of their unbelief." St. Mark records his marvelling only here. The scene of Jesus marvelling at a centurion's faith belongs to St. Matthew and St. Luke, not to this Gospel.

Now John 7:5: "For even his brethren did not believe in him." And Mark 3:21 is harder: his own people went out to seize him, amid talk that he was beside himself; the Greek leaves it unclear who said it.

Say it plainly and do not soften it. The sinless Son of God had relatives who mocked him and relatives who thought he needed to be taken home.

2. Someone will ask about "his brothers and sisters." Handle it now, properly, and then close it.

Leader: give this honestly and then move on. It is not what the module is for, and it will eat the evening if you let it.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The Church holds the perpetual virginity of Mary and understands these as kinsmen rather than other children of Mary (CCC 499-501). The case rests on convergence rather than on one decisive argument, and it is stronger for being presented that way.

One. The Greek word *adelphos* by itself does not settle it. In the Septuagint it regularly translates a Hebrew term covering a wide range of kin, and Genesis 13:8 has Abraham calling Lot his brother when Lot was his nephew.

Two, the one most often cited. Mark 6:3 names James and Joses among the brothers. Mark 15:40 names among the women at the cross "Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses." Have someone read both verses aloud, and be honest about the weight: Mark does not say she is a different Mary, and shared names do not by themselves settle the kinship. It is a cumulative argument, not a proof.

Three. At John 19:26-27 Jesus entrusts his mother to a disciple rather than to a sibling, which is hard to account for if she had other living sons.

Now the other side, at strength, because the study owes it. The natural first reading of a household list that names the mother and then the brothers and sisters is that they are siblings; Matthew 1:25 says Joseph knew her not "until" she had borne a son; and Luke 2:7 calls Jesus her firstborn. Each of those has a Catholic answer, and none of them is silly. **And the honest limit.** None of the three Catholic arguments is a knockdown on its own, and a fair minded Protestant can push on each. The Catholic position rests on the convergence together with the constant witness of the Church, which for a Catholic is decisive and for someone outside it is not. Say that, and then close the topic. The apologetics course exists for anyone who wants to go further.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Do not preview this. It is the only hope in the module and it should arrive as a surprise.

Have someone read John 7:5 aloud again: "For even his brethren did not believe in him."

Then send them looking, in this order. Acts 1:14. Then 1 Corinthians 15:7. Then Galatians 1:19.

Ask one question: what happened to them?

What they should find: Acts 1:14 has the apostles in the upper room devoting themselves to prayer, "together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." The brothers who did not believe in John 7 are praying with the Church in Acts 1. Keep the groups distinct and do not let "relatives" sweep in our Lady, who believed from the beginning. 1 Corinthians 15:7 records an appearance to James, traditionally and most probably James the Lord's brother. Galatians 1:19 has St. Paul calling James "the Lord's brother"; the pillar designation comes later, at Galatians 2:9.

Then say the hard half out loud, and say it accurately. Scripture shows them unbelieving during the ministry and with the Church afterward, and records an appearance to James. The clear change comes after the Resurrection, and the New Testament does not tell us that any argument reached them before it. What they came to see required something none of them could have supplied.

And then ask the group what that means for the people they are praying for, and let the answers be slow.

3. 1 Corinthians 7:12-16. What is the instruction to someone married to an unbeliever? And what does verse 16 actually mean?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The instruction is: if the unbelieving spouse consents to live with you, do not divorce. And the reason given is startling: the unbelieving spouse is consecrated through the believing one, and the children are holy.

Verse 16 is genuinely ambiguous and you should not pretend otherwise: "Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?"

Some read it as hope: you may yet be the means of their salvation, so stay. Others read it as caution: you cannot know that you will, so do not stay only on that calculation. The Greek permits both and RSV2CE leaves the ambiguity standing.

Give the group both readings and do not resolve it. The Catechism cites this passage on marriage with disparity of cult at CCC 1637.

4. 1 Peter 3:1-2. Read the note below first, out loud, and only then the verse.

Leader: this note is mandatory. Give it before the passage is read, not after.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Say this first, in the room: this passage is about witness inside a difficult marriage. It is not counsel to remain in a dangerous one, and it has been misused that way for a very long time. The Church provides for it: CCC 1649 permits physical separation when common life becomes practically impossible, with the bond remaining, and canon 1153 names grave danger of soul or body as a legitimate cause for leaving. Nobody here is obliged to remain in grave danger, physical or psychological, in order to evangelize anyone. Where there is abuse or danger, seek safety first and then pastoral, legal and professional help.

Now the verse. Some, "though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behavior."

And now look at what it actually says. "Though they do not obey the word." That indicates resistance to the gospel message rather than telling us who spoke it or when. These are people who have met the message and resisted it, and St. Peter is describing what may still reach them. The verse does not establish who spoke first or when, and it is certainly not a rule of permanent silence. It is guidance about what works after speaking has already happened and not worked.

That distinction is the hinge of the whole module, and the objection in Build 6 turns on it.

5. Luke 12:51-53. What does Jesus say he came to bring, and what does he not say about it?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He says he came to bring division, and he names it household by household: father against son, mother against daughter, in law against in law.

And what he does not say is that this is anybody's failure. He is not commending division and he is not commanding it. He is telling them in advance that it will happen, which can keep a person from assuming that conflict at home is proof of their own failure. It does not settle any particular case, and it does not excuse anyone from examining their own conduct.

Read that to the parents in the room and then stop talking. A divided family is not by itself proof that you did it badly, and that is different from saying no one ever bears any responsibility. Division was predicted by the Lord as a consequence of his coming, in his own words, before any of it happened.

6. Someone says: never talk to family about faith. It only makes things worse. Just live it and say nothing. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. This is the most sincerely held objection in the whole study and it is half correct.

DIG DEEPER

Eli. 1 Samuel 2:22-25 has a priest speaking to his sons, who would not listen. Scripture does not blame him for their free refusal, and it does hold him culpable for failing to restrain them; 2:29 and 3:13 are unsparing about that. Both halves are there, and neither cancels the other. Handle it carefully with parents in the room.

Jeremiah 12:6. "For even your brothers and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you." The prophet's household was a hard room too.

The exception in Mark 6:5. He healed a few sick people even in Nazareth. The worst reported room in the Gospels still produced something.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it at full strength, and do not be brisk about it. Somebody here has watched the alternative destroy a family.

1 Peter 3:1 seems to say it outright: won **without a word**. If Scripture itself commends wordless witness in exactly this situation, why would anyone argue?

And Nazareth is the Lord's own data. He spoke, in the synagogue, with perfect content and perfect love, and could do no mighty work there. If speech did not work for him at home, the case for our speech is weak.

Then there is the experience in this room. Everyone can name a family where a relative's religious campaign produced a decade of avoided phone calls. The forwarded articles. The comment at the funeral. The Christmas dinner that became an ambush. That damage is real, it is common, and it was always done out of love.

And the strongest form: our speech is often for us rather than for them. It relieves our anxiety, discharges our sense of duty, and lets us feel we have done something. The person on the other end can tell, and what they hear is not the Gospel.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, from the text.

First, read 1 Peter 3:1 again with attention. "Though they do not obey the word." That describes people who

have met the message and resisted it. It does not tell us who spoke it or when, so do not build a sequence on it. What it does rule out is treating the verse as a rule of permanent silence. You cannot get a rule of permanent silence out of a verse addressed to people who have already met the word and resisted it.

Second: Mark 5:19, from Session 12. The first person Jesus explicitly sends anywhere in that Gospel is sent home, and told to **tell** his friends how much the Lord had done for him. Not to demonstrate it quietly. To say it.

Third: the brothers. They did not believe him in John 7, and they are praying with the Church in Acts 1:14. So the hometown is not permanently closed, and the objection's implicit conclusion, that these people are unreachable, is falsified inside the New Testament itself.

Fourth: notice what Nazareth actually lacked. There was no visible change in Jesus for them to explain; they had known him for thirty years and nothing looked new. In the Decapolis, the man's before and after was the entire message and everyone had seen both halves. Your family is closed to argument and it is not closed to a change they can watch.

Now give the objector everything they have earned, because they have earned a lot. Frequency, timing, and venue are where nearly all the damage is done. The holiday ambush is a real sin against a person. Forwarding material is almost never received as love. Raising it at a funeral, a wedding, or a hospital bed uses an occasion against someone who cannot leave.

So the correction is not silence and it is not more. It is less, and better placed, and after a long time. Which is exactly what tonight's practicum asks for.

SEND

- ▶ What is the version of you your family has on file, and what has actually changed since it was written?
- ▶ What have you been doing for years that has not worked?

PRACTICUM

PRACTICUM | the ninety day subtraction

PRACTICUM: the ninety day subtraction. Twelve minutes, and keep it individual.

Almost everyone in this room has been trying harder for a long time. Tonight you are going to try less, on purpose, for a fixed period.

Step one. On paper, name one specific thing you have been doing with a specific family member that is not working. Be concrete. Not "I push too hard," but the actual behavior: the text you send after every argument, the article you forward, the question you ask every time you visit, the comment you make about Mass.

Step two. Write underneath it: I will not do this for ninety days. Put the date ninety days from today next to it.

Step three. Write one thing you will do instead, and make it small and invisible to them. Pray for them by name daily. Call about something entirely unrelated. Show up to the thing they care about that you have never gone to.

Step four. Write one sentence about what you are afraid will happen if you stop. Then look at it, because

that sentence is usually the reason you have been doing the thing.

Nobody reads any of this aloud. Fold it and take it home.

Leader guidance. Do not let this become planning for a specific upcoming holiday. Ninety days of subtraction comes first, and the whole point is that it is long enough to feel like giving up and short enough to be survivable. If someone objects that ninety days of silence is abandoning their duty, take them back to 1 Peter 3:1: the word has already been spoken, many times, and what is being suspended is the repetition rather than the word.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

The next ninety days. Subtraction. This practice asks you to do less.

- Stop the one thing you named tonight, for ninety days. Put the end date somewhere you will see it.
- Pray for that person by name, daily, for all ninety days. This replaces the thing you stopped.
- Go to one thing they care about that you have never gone to, and do not mention faith while you are there.
- If they raise it, follow them, answer honestly, and do not take the opening as permission to resume.
- At ninety days, look again. Not at whether they changed. At whether you did.
- **If anything tonight touched on danger at home rather than difficulty, speak to your leader or your parish privately this week.** No one is obliged to remain in grave danger, and help is available.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, your own family did not believe you, and they were praying with your Church before the second chapter of Acts. Give us that kind of patience, measured in years rather than in conversations. Take from us the words that are really for ourselves. Guard the people we love from our anxiety, and do for them what we cannot. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."

Acts 1:14

MODULE 2 | PART THREE

Leader Reference Card

A Prophet Without Honor

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

Passage	Where and why
Mark 6:1-6	Primary text. Nazareth, and the exception in verse 5.
Mark 3:21	Build 1. His own people said he was beside himself.
John 7:1-5	Primary text. Even his brethren did not believe in him.
Mark 6:3; Mark 15:40	Build 2. James and Joses, and the other Mary. Read both aloud.
Genesis 13:8	Build 2. Abraham calls Lot his brother.
John 19:26-27	Build 2. Jesus entrusts his mother to a disciple.
Acts 1:14	Live discovery and memory verse. His brethren, praying with the Church.
1 Corinthians 15:7	Live discovery. The resurrection appearance to James.
Galatians 1:19	Live discovery. James the Lord's brother, a pillar in Jerusalem.
1 Corinthians 7:12-16	Build 3. The believing and unbelieving spouse, and the ambiguity of verse 16.
1 Peter 3:1-2	Build 4. Read the safety note before this passage, not after.
Luke 12:51-53	Build 5. Division predicted, household by household.
Mark 5:19	Build 6, the press. Go home to your friends and tell them.
1 Samuel 2:22-25	Dig Deeper. Eli spoke to his sons and they would not listen.
Jeremiah 12:6	Old Testament Roots. Even your brothers have dealt treacherously with you.

When Someone in the Church Has Hurt Them

Standalone Practicum Module · Matthew 18:6-7; Matthew 23:1-7, 23-28; John 21:15-19; 2 Corinthians 4:7

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover that the harshest language in the Gospels is aimed at religious leaders who damage the people in their care, that Christ said it before any critic did, and that the truth of a message is not voided by the unworthiness of the messenger. Then learn to tell the difference between an objection and a wound, and to answer each one differently.

Catholic Touchstone

The Church is at once holy and always in need of purification. That is true, and it is not an answer to somebody's pain, and this module exists to keep your people from using it as one.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Read all of this before you run it, and do not run it defensively

The single most common failure in this conversation is answering a wound with an argument. The second most common is defending an institution when the person in front of you was not attacking an institution, they were describing something that happened to them or to someone they love.

The module has one governing rule, and it is in the practicum: **the first sentence may not be a defense.** Everything else follows from that.

Somebody in your own group may have been hurt themselves. Assume it. Do not go around the room, do not ask anyone to share, and be available afterward.

You will not out-condemn Christ on this

Matthew 18:6-7: "whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."

Read that beside the fiercest thing a critic has ever said about the Church and notice which is harsher. The Lord got there first, in his own words, and the Catechism quotes precisely this verse when it treats the gravity of scandal (CCC 2285).

This is the opening move of the whole module. Not "the Church is holy," which is true and is not what the moment needs. The opening move is that Christ said it worse, and he said it about people who harm the vulnerable in his name.

Where the Lord's anger actually falls

Matthew 23 is tonight's live discovery, so hold the detail. What your group needs to see is the pattern: some of Jesus's severest rebukes fall on religious leaders whose hypocrisy harms others. He eats with tax collectors and calls the scribes whitewashed tombs.

And in the middle of that chapter sits the sentence that does the doctrinal work of this module. Matthew 23:2-3: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice."

The authority of the office is not voided by the unworthiness of the holder. Jesus says so about men he is in the middle of denouncing. That is not a dodge invented later to protect an institution; it is his own instruction, given in the same breath as the condemnation.

The Church's own teaching, stated precisely

CCC 1584 puts it as sharply as it can be put: the unworthiness of the minister does not prevent Christ from acting, and the Catechism quotes St. Augustine there, that the spiritual power of the sacrament is like light, which passes through defiled beings without itself being defiled.

And CCC 1550 immediately blocks the misuse: the fact that grace is not impeded by the minister's unworthiness does not mean the minister is thereby without sin. The Church teaches both, in complementary passages, and your people need both.

2 Corinthians 4:7 is an analogous reminder in St. Paul's words: "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us." The vessel was never advertised as the treasure.

What John 21 is doing here, and what it is not doing

Peter denied Christ three times. In John 21:15-19 Jesus asks him three times whether he loves him, and gives him the job back.

Notice what Jesus does not do. He does not pretend it did not happen; the threefold structure makes the denial unmistakable. And he does not make Peter grovel or perform. He asks, and he restores, and he tells him plainly that it will cost him his life.

And notice what this passage is not. It is not a template for quietly restoring a man to ministry after he has harmed someone. Christ restoring Peter after cowardice is not a precedent for a diocese moving a priest after abuse, and if anyone in your group reaches for it that way, stop them. The failure your friend is describing was very often exactly that confusion.

Two different conversations

Before your group can respond well, they have to know which conversation they are in, and there are at least three.

A wound. Something was done to this person or to someone they love. An argument is not the response, and reaching for one is experienced as a second injury. The response is to receive it seriously, say so, and stop talking. Receiving a disclosure seriously is not the same as ruling on every disputed fact in it, and it is not your job to.

An institutional failure. They are describing a documented pattern of cover-up and reassignment. Here the correct response is agreement, because the claim is true, followed eventually by the distinction between the Church's claims and her ministers' conduct.

An objection. They are using the record as a reason the whole thing must be false. This one is actually an argument and can be answered as one, and it is the least common of the three.

Most people mistake the first for the third, and answer a bleeding person with a syllogism.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Shepherds who fed themselves

Ezekiel 34:1-10, which this study has now met three times. Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves; the weak they have not strengthened, the sick they have not healed, the crippled they have not bound up, the strayed they have not brought back. And God says: I am against the shepherds. The indictment of bad religious leadership is a standing theme of the prophets, not a modern grievance.

The sons of Eli

1 Samuel 2:12-17 and 2:22-25. The priests' sons were treating the offerings with contempt and engaging in grave sexual misconduct with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting, and the text says the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord. Scripture records clerical abuse in the sanctuary itself, and does not soften it.

Malachi on priests

Malachi 2:7-9: the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth. And then: but you have turned aside from the way, you have caused many to stumble by your instruction. The standard and the failure, in consecutive verses.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine on light passing through what is defiled

The spiritual power of a sacrament, St. Augustine wrote, is like light: those to be enlightened receive it in its purity, and if it passes through defiled beings it is not itself defiled.

The Catechism quotes him in exactly those terms when it teaches that the unworthiness of the minister does not prevent Christ from acting. This matters to anyone asking whether their own baptism or marriage or absolution still counts. The comforting part is true: a minister's unworthiness does not by itself invalidate a sacrament. Point a specific worry to a priest rather than settling it yourself, since validity turns on more than the minister.

St. Augustine, quoted at CCC 1584.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Benedict XVI, writing to a country that had been failed

In his 2010 pastoral letter to the Catholics of Ireland, Pope Benedict XVI addressed victims of abuse directly, acknowledged that they had suffered grievously, said that he was truly sorry, recognized that their trust had been betrayed and their dignity violated, and acknowledged that in many cases church authorities had failed to act as they should have.

Do not paraphrase this into something softer. A pope writing to an entire nation of Catholics said that the authorities of the Church failed. The Church, including Benedict XVI writing to Ireland, has publicly acknowledged grave abuse and serious failures by church authorities.

Pope Benedict XVI, Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland (2010). Document-level citation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Catherine of Siena, who did not leave

St. Catherine of Siena wrote to popes and cardinals in blunt and unsparing terms about corruption among churchmen, urging reform, calling the pope to act courageously rather than fearfully, and refusing to be deferential about what she thought was rotten.

And she never left. She is the model this module is aiming at: love for the Church that is fierce enough to say the true thing out loud from inside her, rather than defending what should not be defended. Her fidelity is worth commending, and it is not a judgment on people who have needed distance, boundaries or time in order to be safe.

St. Catherine of Siena, summarized from her Letters. A faithful summary of her posture and arguments, not a quotation.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Church has said all of this herself, in her own catechism, and your group should hear it from her rather than from you.

- **CCC 2284-2286.** Scandal, and its particular gravity when caused by those whose office obliges them to teach and form others. CCC 2285 quotes Matthew 18:6 directly.
- **CCC 1584.** The unworthiness of the minister does not prevent Christ from acting in the sacraments.
- **CCC 1550.** And that does not mean the minister is without sin. Both paragraphs, together, or neither.
- **CCC 827.** The Church, holding sinners close, is at once holy and always in need of purification, and follows constantly the path of penance and renewal.
- **CCC 1428.** The call to conversion is addressed to the whole Church, which is at once holy and in need of purification, and this is a work of ongoing repentance rather than a settled state.
- The comparison between a criminal doctor and the practice of medicine, if you use it, is our illustration and not the Church's teaching. Say so when you use it.

LEADER NOTES

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Standalone module. It carries none of the core study's threads.

The governing rule of the whole module is in the practicum: the first sentence may not be a defense. If your group leaves with only that, the module has worked.

Do not let this become a session about the Church's critics. It is a session about how to sit with a friend. The moment the room starts talking about the media, you have lost it. Redirect once, firmly.

Assume someone in the room was hurt. Do not draw anyone out, do not ask for stories, and stay afterward. Know your parish's contact for reporting and for victim assistance before you walk in, and know that in most dioceses there is a specific office for it.

Do not overclaim reform. If someone asks what has changed since 2002, say what you actually know and admit what you do not. Overclaiming here destroys your credibility with exactly the person you are trying to reach.

SESSION GOALS

1. Establish from Matthew 18:6 that Christ's language on this is harsher than any critic's.
2. Have the group discover for themselves where the Lord's anger falls in the Gospels.
3. Land Matthew 23:2-3 as the Lord's own instruction rather than a later institutional defense.
4. Have the group name the three different conversations, and practice telling them apart.
5. Use John 21 correctly and block its misuse.
6. Work the objection at full strength without flinching and without defending what should not be defended.
7. Have every person in the room say a first sentence out loud that is not a defense.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer, and the note that nobody will be asked to share anything personal tonight.
0:05-0:12	Win questions.
0:12-0:22	Build 1, Matthew 18:6-7. Read it aloud twice.
0:22-0:34	Live discovery: where does the Lord's anger fall?
0:34-0:44	Build 2, Matthew 23:2-3, and the Church's own teaching in CCC 1584 and 1550.
0:44-0:52	Build 3, John 21, including what it is not.
0:52-1:02	Build 4, the three conversations.
1:02-1:16	Build 5, the build-then-press. Give it the full time and do not rush the concessions.
1:16-1:28	Practicum: the first sentence.
1:28-1:30	Take-homes and closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Drop Build 3 (John 21), keeping only the spoken warning about its misuse. Saves eight minutes.
- Run the Matthew 23 discovery as a straight reading of verses 1 to 7 with one question. Saves six minutes.
- Shorten Build 4 by giving the three conversations yourself rather than drawing them out. Saves five minutes.
- **Do not cut Build 5 or the practicum.** The practicum is the only thing in this module that changes anybody's behavior.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If someone in the room discloses that they were hurt, stop the module. Do not process it in the group, do not let anyone else respond, and thank them. Move on gently within a minute, for their protection rather than

the room's comfort, and find them afterward.

Safeguarding, and this part is not optional. Where a disclosure concerns a minor or a vulnerable adult, or where there is any sign of present danger, follow civil law and your diocesan safeguarding policy, including mandatory reporting where it applies. Do not promise confidentiality you cannot keep. Do not investigate, do not test the account, and do not adjudicate disputed detail; receiving a disclosure seriously is not the same as ruling on every fact in it. Where there is immediate risk, act now rather than in the week. Know your diocesan safeguarding and victim assistance contacts before you lead this session.

If the room turns to the media, to anti-Catholic bias, or to what other institutions have done, redirect once and firmly: none of that is a sentence you can say to a hurting friend, and this module is about what you can say.

If someone deploys "the Church is holy, her members are sinners" as a conversation ender, agree that it is true and then ask them to imagine saying it to a survivor. That question does the work better than any correction from you.

If someone asks what has actually changed since the scandals broke, answer with what you know and admit what you do not. Do not improvise a reform record.

If the room gets angry at the Church, let it. Anger at grave injustice can be entirely right and should not be managed away, though like all anger it still needs charitable direction.

Discussion Guide

When Someone in the Church Has Hurt Them

Matthew 18:6-7; Matthew 23:1-7, 23-28; John 21:15-19; 2 Corinthians 4:7

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, some of your severest words fell on religious men who hurt the people in their care, and you meant every one of them. Give us the honesty not to defend what you condemned, the humility to agree when someone tells us the truth about your Church, and the restraint to stop talking when talking is not what is needed. Amen.

WIN

- ▶ When has someone apologized to you properly? What made it land?
- ▶ Think of a time someone gave you an explanation when you needed something else. What did you actually need?

BUILD

Nobody will be asked to share anything personal tonight. Read Matthew 18:6-7 aloud, twice, slowly.

1. Matthew 18:6-7. Who is Jesus talking about, and how does the severity of his language compare with the harshest thing you have heard anyone say about the Church?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He is talking about anyone who causes one of these little ones who believe in him to sin, and he says it would be better for that person to be drowned in the depth of the sea with a millstone around his neck.

Now put it beside the angriest thing your friend has ever said about the Catholic Church, or the angriest headline you have read. Christ speaks at least as severely, and about causing his little ones to sin. Applying it to abuse is an application, and it is a sound one.

This is the opening move of the whole module, and it is not "the Church is holy." It is that you cannot out-condemn Christ on this, so you do not have to try, and you certainly do not have to argue against the condemnation.

The Catechism quotes this exact verse when it treats the gravity of scandal, at CCC 2285, and notes that scandal is graver by reason of the authority of the one who causes it.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Send them looking. The answer surprises people who have not noticed the pattern.

Have someone read Matthew 23:1-7 aloud, and a second person read Matthew 23:23-28.

Then ask one question: across the Gospels, who receives some of his severest rebukes?

What they should find: some of his severest rebukes fall on religious leaders. He eats with tax collectors and calls the scribes and Pharisees whitewashed tombs. He is gentle with the woman caught in adultery and scorching with men who bind heavy burdens and will not lift a finger to move them, and who shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces.

Then ask them to find the one instruction inside the denunciation, at Matthew 23:2-3, and read it aloud.

Which is: the scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do. Let the group sit with the fact that this sentence is in the middle of the fiercest chapter in the Gospel.

2. Matthew 23:2-3. What is Jesus telling the crowd to do, and what does that establish?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

To do what these men say and not what they do. A hypocrite's teaching is not thereby false, and Jesus says so while denouncing them. Do not slide straight from there to sacramental efficacy: that rests on CCC 1584 and is a distinct principle. And note what this text never licenses, obedience to an immoral command or silence about abuse.

That matters enormously in this conversation, because the principle is not a later institutional defense invented to protect anybody. It is the Lord's own instruction, given in the same breath as the condemnation.

The Church states it in the same two-sided way. CCC 1584 says the unworthiness of the minister does not prevent Christ from acting in the sacraments, quoting St. Augustine that light passing through defiled things is not itself defiled. And CCC 1550 immediately blocks the misuse: that does not mean the minister is thereby without sin.

One practical use worth naming. People who were baptized, married, or absolved by someone later disgraced sometimes quietly wonder whether it counted. The answer to the fear as they are asking it is yes: a minister's personal sin or later disgrace does not by itself invalidate an otherwise valid sacrament. Say that, and add the honest caveat, that validity also depends on matter, form, intention and, where required, orders and faculties, so a specific worry about a specific sacrament belongs with a priest or a tribunal. Note too that in the Latin Church the spouses themselves are the ordinary ministers of Matrimony.

And 2 Corinthians 4:7 is an analogous reminder rather than a proof of sacramental validity: the treasure is in earthen vessels, so that the power belongs to God and not to us. The vessel was never advertised as the treasure.

3. John 21:15-19. What does Jesus do with Peter, and what does he not do? Then say what this passage is not.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He asks three times whether Peter loves him, matching the three denials, and gives him the job back. He does not pretend the denial did not happen, and he does not require Peter to perform contrition or grovel. And he tells him plainly that it will end in his death.

So restoration is real, it is possible, and it does not involve pretending.

And now say what this passage is not, out loud, because someone will reach for it. Christ restoring Peter after cowardice is not a precedent for an institution quietly returning a man to ministry after he has harmed someone. Peter's failure was cowardice about himself, and it differs in kind from the exploitation of another person. Do not call it victimless: he publicly disowned Christ. Confusing those two is very close to the actual failure your friend is describing.

4. Before you can respond well, you have to know which conversation you are in. Working from your own experience, how many different conversations are hiding under "the Church hurt me"?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

At least three, and they need different responses.

A wound. Something was done to this person, or to someone they love. An argument is not the response here, and reaching for one is felt as a second injury. The response is to receive it seriously, to say so, and then to be quiet. That is different from adjudicating every detail, which is not yours to do.

An institutional failure. They are describing a documented pattern of concealment and reassignment. The correct response is agreement, because the claim is true. The distinction between the Church's claims and her ministers' conduct comes later, if ever, and never in the first ten minutes.

An objection. They are using the record as an argument that the whole thing must be false. This one really is an argument and can be treated as one. It is also the least common of the three.

The failure mode is mistaking the first for the third. Most of us answer a bleeding person with a syllogism, and then wonder why the friendship cooled.

5. Someone says: the Church covered up the abuse of children for decades. There is no answer to that, and anyone who defends the institution is complicit. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below carefully. Notice before you start that the press does not begin by disputing anything.

DIG DEEPER

Ezekiel 34:1-10. Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves. The weak not strengthened, the sick not healed, the strayed not brought back. And then: I am against the shepherds. This study has now met this chapter three times, and this is the sharpest use of it.

1 Samuel 2:12-17 and 22-25. The sons of Eli treating the offerings with contempt, and lying with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Scripture records abuse in the sanctuary and does not soften it.

Malachi 2:7-9. The lips of a priest should guard knowledge; and you have caused many to stumble by your instruction. The standard and the failure in consecutive verses.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it at full strength and do not soften a word of it. Softening it in this room is practice for softening it in front of a friend.

The factual claim is true and documented. Priests abused children. Bishops knew. Men were moved to other parishes where they offended again. Victims who came forward were disbelieved, pressured, and sometimes treated as the problem. This continued after it was known, in multiple countries, for decades.

And it was not a failure of the Church's teaching. Everyone involved knew exactly what the Church taught.

And now the harder version, which the study owes you. The objection is not only about individual sinners. The concealment was institutional: decisions taken by men in office, repeated across dioceses and countries, with the instinct to protect the institution winning over the protection of children. That looks like a failure of the Church's governance rather than a failure of a few of her members, and it appears to sit badly with what the Church says about herself. Put it that way, because that is the form your friend will put it in. The failure was in the men entrusted with applying it, and the instinct that took over was to protect the institution's reputation over its children.

The objector can also point out, fairly, that the "holy Church, sinful members" distinction arrives most often precisely when Catholics are uncomfortable, which makes it look like a technique rather than a doctrine.

And the hardest form: for the person in front of you, the Church is not an abstraction. It is a particular building, a particular man, and a particular year. Nothing about the Church's universal claims touches what happened in that room.

Then press, from the text:

Now press, and notice where the pressing starts.

First, agree. The factual claim is true. Say so, without qualification and without a "but" in the same sentence. Any Catholic who disputes the record has lost the conversation and deserves to have lost it. This is not a concession made for effect; it is the truth, and it is the first thing to say.

Second, name the distinctions the institutional objection actually needs, without using them to minimise anything. The Church claims holiness in her origin, her Founder and her sacraments, and indefectibility in her endurance and her teaching. She has never claimed that her officeholders are impeccable or that her governance is well run, and the record here is a real and grave failure of governance for which the Church has apologised. Those distinctions are not a dodge, and they are also not a defence of what was done. Third, take them to Matthew 18:6. Not defensively. Show them that the strongest condemnation of what happened is not in a report or a headline; it is in the Gospel, in Christ's own mouth, about people who harm the little ones who believe in him. You are not on opposite sides of this. You are quoting the person you are asking them to consider.

Fourth, the actual distinction, once it can be heard. Matthew 23:2-3 is Jesus telling a crowd to obey the teaching of men whose conduct he had just eviscerated. The claim of Christianity is that a particular man rose from the dead. That claim is either true or false, and nothing done by a bishop in 1987 makes it more or less true. Those are separable questions, and the first is the one nothing here touches. Be honest that other real questions remain: whether Christ founded and still guides this Church, whether her doctrinal claims are true, and whether a particular parish is presently safe. Misconduct does not make the Resurrection false; it does not answer those questions either.

Fifth, and mark this one as ours rather than the Church's: if a doctor abused a patient, nobody would conclude that medicine is false. They would conclude that the doctor was a criminal and the hospital

covered it up, and both of those would demand justice. The illustration is ours. Say so when you use it, and know that it will not land on someone who is bleeding.

Now the concessions, and give them fully. Do not overclaim reform; say what you actually know and admit what you do not. Do not use the holy Church distinction as a shield, because it is true and it is not an answer to pain. And accept that for many people this is not an argument at all. It is a wound, and the correct response to a wound is not a syllogism. Sometimes the right move is to say "I am so sorry that happened to you," and then to say nothing else at all for a long time.

SEND

- ▶ Who in your life has stopped going because of something that was done? Do you actually know the story, or only that they stopped?
- ▶ What is your instinct in this conversation, and is it the right one?

PRACTICUM

PRACTICUM | the first sentence

PRACTICUM: the first sentence. Twelve minutes, in pairs.

The rule for the whole exercise: your first sentence may not be a defense. Not a "but," not a "well actually," not a statistic, not "every institution has this problem," and not "the Church is holy even when her members are not."

Round one. In pairs. One person says, in their own words, something they have actually heard from a real person: what was done to them, or to someone they love, or why they stopped going. The other person responds with **three sentences and no more**, and the first one cannot be a defense.

Then swap. Then do it once more, with a different opening.

Round two, the harder one. Same pairs. This time the speaker states it as an argument rather than a wound: this proves the whole thing is false. The responder again gets three sentences, and the first still cannot be a defense.

Notice how different the two rounds feel, and notice how strong the pull is to give the same answer to both.

Debrief, five minutes, whole group. Two questions only. What was the hardest thing about not defending? And did anyone find a first sentence they would actually use?

Leader guidance. For most people the true first sentence is some version of "I am so sorry that happened to you," or "thank you for telling me," or "I want to understand." Keep "you are right" for what you actually know, since agreement to facts you have not heard is not compassion. Many will never have said any of it out loud. That is the entire point of the exercise. Do not let anyone rehearse a clever response, and do not let the pairs drift into discussing the Church. If somebody's three sentences are all silence, that is a passing answer and you should say so.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

This week. One conversation you have been avoiding, and one sentence you have never said.

- Think of one person you know who left, or pulled back, over something that was done. Not a category of person. One person.
- Ask them what happened, if you have never asked and if they are willing. Then respond with the first sentence you practised, and little else. If what you hear involves a minor, a vulnerable adult, or anyone presently at risk, that is no longer a conversation to hold on your own: contact your diocesan safeguarding office, and civil authorities where the law requires it.
- If you are not able to have that conversation, write the first sentence down anyway and keep it.
- Find out this week who handles reporting and victim assistance in your diocese, and write the contact down. Leaders should know these contacts, so they can respond responsibly and promptly.
- And pray for the person by name, without praying that they come back. Pray for them.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you said it would be better for a man to be drowned than to harm one of your little ones, and you were not exaggerating. We are sorry for what has been done in your name, and for every time we have hurried past it to defend something. Give us the courage to agree, the patience to stay quiet, and mercy for the people who cannot come back yet. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us."

2 Corinthians 4:7

MODULE 3 | PART THREE

Leader Reference Card

When Someone in the Church Has Hurt Them

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

Passage	Where and why
Matthew 18:6-7	Primary text, read aloud twice. The millstone.
Matthew 23:1-7	Live discovery. Burdens bound and not lifted; the seat of Moses.
Matthew 23:23-28	Live discovery. Whitewashed tombs.
Matthew 23:2-3	Build 2. Do what they say, not what they do.
John 21:15-19	Build 3. Peter restored, and what the passage is not.
2 Corinthians 4:7	Build 2 and memory verse. Treasure in earthen vessels.
Ezekiel 34:1-10	Old Testament Roots and Dig Deeper. I am against the shepherds.
1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25	Old Testament Roots and Dig Deeper. The sons of Eli.
Malachi 2:7-9	Old Testament Roots. The priest who caused many to stumble.

Leader Preparation Guide

The Invitation

Standalone Practicum Module · Luke 5:17-26; Luke 14:15-24; Acts 8:26-31; John 1:35-46

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover from the men who let a paralysed man down through a roof that Jesus responds to the faith he sees in the group carrying somebody who could not carry himself, that the obstacle they had to get through was the crowd already inside, and that the invitation in the banquet parable is issued three separate times and gets more specific each time. Then write the actual message you are going to send.

Catholic Touchstone

The Church proposes the faith and does not coerce assent, which leaves her teaching authority and her legitimate discipline entirely intact. And a proposal has to be concrete enough to be accepted or declined. Most of this module is practical advice, which is ours rather than the Church's teaching, and it is labeled that way throughout.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This is the most practical module in the study

Roughly half of tonight is logistics: which Mass, what to say beforehand, what happens at Communion, how to explain Confession to somebody who has been away thirty years, and who to call about OCIA.

Almost all of that is our practical advice rather than Catholic teaching, and you should say so out loud when you give it. The doctrine in this module is thin and firm. The advice is thick and negotiable.

Before you run this, find out three things about your own parish and write them down: the Mass you would actually bring a stranger to, the confession times including anything by appointment, and the name and contact of whoever runs OCIA. If you do not have those three, the practicum will not work.

The men and the roof

Luke 5:17-26. Men come carrying a paralysed man on a bed, cannot get near because of the crowd, go up on the roof, and let him down through the tiles into the middle in front of Jesus. Two details come from St. Mark rather than St. Luke and should be cited there: Mark 2:3 says there were four of them, and Mark 2:4 has them digging out an opening.

Then verse 20, which is the verse this module exists for: "And when he saw **their** faith he said, Man, your sins are forgiven you."

The faith he sees in the group who brought him. Note what Luke does not say: it does not say the paralysed man lacked faith, and it does not make another person's faith a substitute for his own. What it shows is Jesus

responding to faith visibly expressed by the people carrying somebody who could not carry himself, and the man on the mat is not recorded as saying a word before he is forgiven.

Two details worth pressing. **They opened somebody's roof**, which St. Mark describes as digging out. What it cost, and whether it was made good, the Gospels do not say; treat that as reconstruction if you use it. And the obstacle between them and Jesus was the crowd, which is to say the people who were already inside listening. Sit with that for a moment before you decide it is unfair.

The banquet, and three servant sendings

Luke 14:15-24. A man gives a great banquet and invites many. At the hour, he sends his servant to say come, for all is now ready, and they all alike begin to make excuses: a field, five yoke of oxen, a wife.

Then the servant is sent **again**, to the streets and lanes, for the poor and maimed and blind and lame. And when there is still room, he is sent a **third** time, to the highways and hedges.

Three servant sendings, at verses 17, 21 and 23, each reaching further out. Do not say each gets more specific; the third does not name classes of people at all. And keep them distinct from the original invitation issued earlier. The first invitation being declined is not the end of the story; it is the beginning of the second verse.

And now the hard phrase, which you must handle honestly. The third sending says "compel people to come in." That phrase has an ugly reception history: St. Augustine used it in his letters concerning the Donatists to justify state coercion of schismatics, and he is one of the greatest of the Fathers and he was wrong about this. The Church's settled teaching is that the act of faith is of its very nature free and that no one may be coerced (Dignitatis Humanae 10, CCC 160). Give your group both facts. It is a live demonstration that a real saint can be mistaken and that the Church can develop.

How can I, unless someone guides me

Acts 8:26-31. Philip runs up to the chariot, hears the man reading Isaiah, and asks whether he understands what he is reading. And the Ethiopian says: "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invites Philip to come up and sit with him.

Two things for tonight. The opening was a question rather than an offer. And the invitation, when it came, ran in the other direction: the seeker invited the guide to sit down.

A great many of the invitations your people are afraid to issue would be accepted, and some of them are already being waited for.

What the practical advice is actually for

The immediate reason people do not invite is often practical rather than theological. It is that they cannot picture the next ninety minutes and do not know what to say about Communion.

Solve that and much of the barrier drops. A great deal of the alienation a guest feels at Mass is eased by ten minutes of preparation beforehand and by somebody sitting next to them who knows what is happening. Theological, cultural, disability-related and trauma barriers are real, and preparation does not dissolve them.

The discussion guide carries the specific scripts. Mark them as ours when you give them.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

A table set for the wrong people

Isaiah 25:6-8: a feast of rich food for all peoples on the mountain, where death is swallowed up forever. Proverbs 9:1-6: Wisdom builds her house, sets her table, and sends out her servants to call from the highest places in the town. The banquet to which the unlikely are summoned is an Old Testament image before it is a parable.

Come, buy without money

Isaiah 55:1-3: everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come, buy and eat. The invitation in Scripture is characteristically issued to people who cannot pay for what is offered, which is worth remembering before anyone decides a friend is not ready.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine, and a mistake worth naming

St. Augustine used "compel them to come in" from this parable, in his letters concerning the Donatists, to defend the use of state coercion against schismatics. He is among the greatest of the Fathers, and this study has quoted him more than anyone else. What the Church now teaches, and what he defended, have to be stated precisely: the act of faith is by its nature free and no one may be forced to embrace it, so using civil coercion to compel religious adherence is rejected. Note the distinction he himself worked with, between forcing interior assent, which he also rejected, and applying civil pressure to the already baptised, which he defended and which the Church does not.

The Church's settled teaching is that the act of faith is of its very nature free, that nobody may be forced to embrace the faith against his will, and that Christ invited people to faith and refused to impose it by force. Hold both halves together. An account that only ever quotes saints approvingly is training people to argue badly.

St. Augustine, from his correspondence concerning the Donatists, where Letters 93 and 185 are the passages usually cited; read against Dignitatis Humanae 2, 7 and 10 and CCC 160. Document-level citation, since the letter numbering should be checked against the edition used.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Francis on what a confessional is not

The confessional, Pope Francis wrote, must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us on to do our best.

Say it out loud, because some Catholics carry a bad experience in a confessional from years ago, and it can quietly shape how they approach the sacrament afterward. They will not invite anyone to something they are themselves avoiding.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium 44 (2013).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Vianney, who simply stayed in the box

The Curé of Ars spent extraordinary hours hearing confessions, in later years for the better part of a day, as people travelled from across France to a village that had been notable for nothing. He was not a scholar and

had struggled badly with his studies for the priesthood.

What he did was make himself available, relentlessly, in one place, for years. It is worth remembering, because the whole point of what follows is lowering the cost of somebody else's next step.

St. John Vianney, from the standard accounts of his ministry at Ars. Historical summary, not a quotation; a named biography should be supplied before publication.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

Two of these are doctrinal and must be got right. The rest of the module is practical and is ours.

- **CCC 1422 and 1423-1424.** The sacrament of Penance, and the several names the Church gives it: conversion, penance, confession, forgiveness, reconciliation.
- **CCC 1458.** Confession of everyday faults is strongly recommended even when not strictly necessary.
- **CCC 1400.** Eucharistic intercommunion with the ecclesial communities of the Reformation is not possible, because they have not preserved the sacrament of Orders in its fullness. State this plainly and kindly; a guest deserves the real reason.
- **CCC 1401.** The narrow circumstances of exceptional sacramental sharing, judged by the diocesan bishop or episcopal conference under the conditions the paragraph sets out.
- **CCC 160.** The act of faith is of its very nature free, and Christ never coerced anyone.
- **CCC 1389 and 2181.** The Sunday obligation, for context when a guest asks why you go every week.
- Every script in the discussion guide is our wording, not the Church's, and should be adapted freely.

LEADER NOTES

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Standalone module. It carries none of the core study's threads, and it pairs naturally with Session 10, which established that the destination is the Church rather than you.

Do the homework before you lead. The Mass you would bring a stranger to, your parish's confession times, and the OCIA contact. Written down, in your hand, in the room.

Mark the advice as advice. The master rule of this module is that our practical suggestions never get dressed as the Church's teaching. Say "here is what I would do" rather than "the Church says."

Watch for the person who is themselves avoiding Confession. They are in the room, quite possibly leading it, and they will not invite anyone to something they are avoiding. The Pope Francis voice is there for them.

Do not let the group build a parish evangelization program tonight. The unit of this module is one message to one person.

SESSION GOALS

1. Land Luke 5:20 on the room: he saw **their** faith, and the man on the mat had said nothing.

2. Have the group notice that the obstacle was the crowd already inside, and that the friends had to break something.
3. Have them count the three sendings in the banquet parable and see that each goes further out.
4. Handle "compel them to come in" honestly, including where St. Augustine went wrong and what the Church now teaches.
5. Give the practical scripts, clearly marked as ours, especially the one about Communion.
6. Work the objection that Mass is the worst possible first invitation.
7. Have every person write and send an actual message before they leave the room.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Win questions.
0:12-0:26	Read Luke 5:17-26 aloud. Build 1 and 2.
0:26-0:36	Read Luke 14:15-24 aloud. Build 3, the three sendings.
0:36-0:44	Live discovery: the phrase that was misused.
0:44-0:56	Build 4, the practical scripts. This is the part they came for.
0:56-1:08	Build 5, the build-then-press on whether Mass is the wrong first invitation.
1:08-1:24	Practicum: write it and send it.
1:24-1:30	Take-homes and closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Drop Build 3 and summarize the three sendings yourself in two minutes. Saves eight minutes.
- Run the discovery as a leader note rather than a group hunt. Saves six minutes, and it is a real loss because it is the most interesting thing in the module.
- Cut the Acts 8 material entirely; it is prep colour rather than load bearing. Saves five minutes.
- **Do not cut Build 4 or the practicum.** If people leave without having sent something, the module has not happened.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If someone says they would be embarrassed by their own parish, do not argue. That is Session 10's objection and it has a full treatment there. Tonight, ask them which Mass in the area they would bring someone to, and let the answer be a different parish if it has to be.

If someone in the group has not been to Confession in years and it surfaces, do not pursue it in the room.

Mention your parish's times in passing as part of the practical content, so the information reaches them without anyone being addressed.

If the group starts debating who may receive Communion, give CCC 1400 and 1401 plainly, say that the narrow exceptions are for a minister to judge rather than for us, and move on. It will eat the module.

If someone objects that "compel them to come in" is being twisted, welcome the challenge and read the Church's own teaching at CCC 160. The point of raising it is precisely that the phrase has been abused.

Discussion Guide

The Invitation

Luke 5:17-26; Luke 14:15-24; Acts 8:26-31; John 1:35-46

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, some men once opened a hole in somebody's roof to get their friend in front of you, and you called that faith. Give us that much nerve and that much practicality. Show us the one message we have been meaning to send for a year, and let us send it tonight. Amen.

WIN

- ▶ What is the last invitation you accepted that you almost declined? What made you say yes?
- ▶ When you have gone to something religious in another tradition, what made you feel most out of place?

BUILD

Read Luke 5:17-26 aloud. Ask the group to picture the logistics: the size of the crowd, the height of the roof, the cost of the tiles, and what the man on the mat could see from where he was lying.

1. Luke 5:18-20. What did the friends have to do, and whose faith does verse 20 say Jesus saw?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They could not get near because of the crowd, so they went up on the roof, removed the tiles, and let him down through the opening into the middle, in front of Jesus.

And verse 20: "when he saw **their** faith he said, Man, your sins are forgiven you."

Their faith: the faith he sees in the group who brought him. The man on the mat is not recorded as saying a word before he is forgiven. Jesus responds to the faith he sees in the people carrying somebody who could not carry himself, which is not the same as saying the man himself had none.

Say plainly what that means for the people on your list: you are not waiting for their faith in order to act. Yours is already doing something, and none of this makes their own coming to faith unnecessary.

2. Two details in that passage are uncomfortable. What did the men have to open, and what exactly was in their way?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They opened a roof. Luke has them let him down through the tiles; Mark 2:4 says they dug out an opening. Somebody owned that house, and what it cost or whether it was made good the Gospels do not say. Mark it as reconstruction when you use it, and the point survives: getting their friend in front of Jesus was

disruptive and made a mess.

And what was in the way was the crowd. Not opposition, not the authorities, not the weather. The people who were already inside listening.

Let that sit before anybody explains it away. The obstacle between a person and Christ is very often the people who are already in the room, and it is usually not deliberate. It is just that we filled the doorway.

Ask the group what the modern version of the crowd is, and do not accept a general answer. Make them name something specific about their own parish or their own group.

3. Luke 14:15-24. How many times is the servant sent out, and how does the instruction change each time?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Three, at verses 17, 21 and 23. First the summons to those already invited, who all alike make excuses: a field, five yoke of oxen, a wife. Then out into the streets and lanes for the poor and maimed and blind and lame. Then out to the highways and hedges. Note that the original invitation came earlier, before the banquet was ready.

Each sending reaches further out. The first refusal is not the end of the story; it is the beginning of the second sending.

And note the excuses. None of them is hostile. They are all reasonable, ordinary, busy-life reasons, which is exactly what your invitations will get.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Send them looking, and then tell them the history. This is a two part discovery.

First, have someone find the exact phrase in the third sending, at Luke 14:23, and read the verse aloud: "Go out to the highways and hedges, and **compel** people to come in, that my house may be filled."

Ask the group what that phrase could be used to justify.

Then give them the history, because it was. St. Augustine used this verse, in his correspondence concerning the Donatists, to defend the use of imperial force against schismatics; Letters 93 and 185 are the passages usually cited. That is not an anti-Catholic caricature, and it was influential for centuries afterward. Be precise about what he argued: he did not hold that interior assent could be compelled, he held that civil pressure on the already baptised was legitimate.

Then have someone read CCC 160 aloud. The act of faith is of its very nature free. Nobody may be forced to embrace the faith against his will. Christ invited people to faith and conversion and never coerced them; he bore witness to the truth and refused to impose it by force on those who spoke against it.

Now ask the real question: what do you do when a saint you admire, quoted approvingly in this very study, turns out to have been wrong about something the Church now teaches clearly? Let them work it out. The answer is that the Church is not a collection of infallible individuals, that development is real, and that a study which only ever quotes saints approvingly is training people to argue badly.

4. Practical section. What actually stops people from inviting someone to Mass, and what would fix it?

Leader: everything in this answer is our practical advice, not Church teaching. Say so when you give it.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The immediate obstacle is often practical rather than theological. It is that they cannot picture the next ninety minutes, and that they do not know what to say about Communion.

On which Mass. Pick the one you would actually bring a stranger to, which may not be the one you usually attend and may not even be at your own parish. Tell your friend the start time, tell them you will meet them outside, and be there ten minutes early.

On the ninety minutes. Beforehand, in about two minutes: there is a lot of standing and sitting, nobody minds if you stay seated, there are readings, then a talk, then the part where we believe the bread and wine become Christ, and then people go up to receive. Say that you will be sitting next to them the whole time.

On Communion, which is the one everybody fumbles. Check your own parish's practice first; the crossed-arms gesture is a widespread local custom rather than a universal norm, and staying in the pew is always a safe default. Say it in advance, kindly, and never at the moment. Our wording, adapt it: "When people go up, I am going to go. You are very welcome to stay in the pew, or to come with me and cross your arms for a blessing, which many parishes here are used to, though you should check what yours actually does, since it is a local custom rather than a universal norm and a blessing is not guaranteed by the gesture. It is not a judgment on you; the Catholic Church understands receiving as a statement that you are already fully in communion with her, and we do not want to put you in the position of saying something you do not yet mean."

The doctrine underneath, which is fixed. CCC 1400 states that intercommunion with the ecclesial communities of the Reformation is not possible, and gives the reason. CCC 1401 gives narrow exceptions, judged by the diocesan bishop or the episcopal conference under the conditions the paragraph lists, and not by us. Give the real reason rather than an embarrassed one; people can tell the difference.

On Confession, for somebody who has been away. Our wording: "You can walk in and say, it has been thirty years and I do not remember how this goes. The priest will take it from there. That happens more than you would think."

On OCIA. Know the name of the person who runs it, know roughly when it starts, and offer to introduce them rather than passing on an email address.

And the invitation that is not Mass. For many people the first invitation should be dinner at your house with other Catholics in it. See Session 10.

5. Someone says: Mass is the worst possible first invitation. Ninety minutes of things they do not understand, in language they do not use, where they cannot participate in the main event and everyone will know they are an outsider. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. The objection is right about sequencing and wrong about the destination.

DIG DEEPER

Acts 8:26-31. Philip opens with a question rather than an offer, and the invitation runs the other way: the Ethiopian asks him to come up and sit. Some of the invitations we are afraid to issue are already being waited for.

John 1:39 and 1:46. "Come and see," twice, once from Jesus and once from Philip. Note that Philip's invitation is not content-free: at verse 45 he has just made a specific messianic claim and named Jesus's town and father. "Come and see" invites Nathanael to test that claim in person, which is exactly the point Session 1 makes.

Isaiah 55:1-3. Everyone who thirsts, come; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat. In Scripture the invitation is characteristically issued to people who cannot pay for what is offered.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it properly. Most of it is observably true.

The Mass is genuinely opaque to a newcomer. There is standing and sitting and kneeling that everyone else knows and they do not, responses they cannot join, and a rhythm that assumes years of formation.

The Communion moment is genuinely alienating. Everyone else in the building gets up and walks forward, and your friend sits alone in a pew while the whole congregation files past. Whatever you said beforehand, that is what it feels like.

And a poorly celebrated or unwelcoming Mass can make a damaging first impression. If the music is poor, the homily is thin, and nobody speaks to your guest, you have spent your one invitation on an experience that argues against you. (Note for the leader: the objector's phrasing here concerns the guest's experience. A validly celebrated Mass has its own objective worth whatever the guest felt, and the press should say so.)

Meanwhile a dinner at your house costs your friend nothing socially, lets them ask questions, and puts them next to Catholics who are recognizably normal. The objection is really about sequence, and about not spending your best card first.

Then press, from the text:

Now press.

First, from tonight's parable: the servant is sent to bring people **in**, to the banquet. The parable's primary reference is entry into the kingdom and the eschatological feast; reading the table Eucharistically is a Catholic application, and a legitimate one. Either way, the destination is not a preliminary. And on the objector's aside about a badly celebrated Mass: a guest's experience can indeed be damaging, and the Mass itself does not lose its worth because it was celebrated poorly. Both are true, and only the first is a reason to choose which Mass you bring them to.

Second, from Session 10: you cannot give anybody the Eucharist. If you never get someone to the sacraments, you have handed them to yourself, and you are not enough.

Third, from tonight's primary text: the friends carried the man to where Jesus actually was. It was inconvenient, it involved a roof, and they did not settle for a location that was easier to get to.

Fourth, and this is where the objection mostly dissolves: much of the alienation it describes is eased by ten minutes of preparation and by sitting next to the person. Not all of it: theological, cultural, disability-related

and trauma barriers are real and preparation does not dissolve them. The problem is not the liturgy. It is that we invite people to it without telling them anything, and then leave them to work out the Communion procession on their own in real time.

And concede the sequencing entirely, because it is right. For most people the first invitation should not be Mass. It should be a table with Catholics at it. Spend the early invitations on your kitchen, and get to the liturgy when there is a relationship strong enough to survive a bad homily. What the objection cannot support is never getting there.

SEND

- ▶ Which Mass would you bring a stranger to? Name the parish and the time out loud.
- ▶ What is the invitation you have been meaning to issue for more than a year?

PRACTICUM

PRACTICUM | write it, and send it before you leave

PRACTICUM: write it and send it. Sixteen minutes, and nobody leaves without having sent something.

Step one, four minutes. On paper, write three things: the name of one person, the specific thing you are inviting them to, and the date and time. If you cannot fill in all three, you have not yet made an invitation, you have made a gesture.

Step two, six minutes. Draft the actual message you will send. Rules, and these are ours: keep it under four sentences. Name the specific event and time. Say that you will be there and will meet them. Give them an easy way to say no in the same message, because an invitation that is hard to decline is a form of pressure.

Step three, three minutes, in pairs. Read your message to one other person. The listener answers one question only: would this be easy to say no to? If the answer is no, rewrite it.

Step four. Send it. Now, in the room, before you leave. Phones out.

Step five, three minutes. Whoever wants to can say what they sent. Nobody has to.

Leader guidance. The resistance to step four is the whole exercise, and you will feel it in the room. Expect two objections. "The timing is wrong" is almost always fear, and the fix is that the invitation names a specific date, so a wrong date can simply be declined. "I want to think about the wording" is also fear, and four sentences is not a document. Send yours first, out loud, before you ask anyone else to.

If someone genuinely has nobody to invite to anything, have them write the message they would send and keep it. That is a real outcome and should be received as one.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

This week. You have already sent one. Now handle what comes back.

- If they said yes: confirm the time, and be outside ten minutes early. Do the two minute explanation before you walk in. Sit next to them the whole way through.
- If they said no: reply warmly, do not explain, do not ask why, and do not offer an alternative in the same message. The banquet parable has three sendings, and the delay this study suggests is prudential advice rather than something the parable teaches; the sendings there run within one continuous sequence.
- If they did not reply: leave it alone as your default. Non-response can be oversight as easily as refusal, so one gentle follow-up later is fine; chasing it is not.
- Either way, find out your parish's confession times and the OCIA contact this week, and write both down where you can find them.
- And go to Confession yourself before you invite anyone else to it.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, some men carried their friend to you and opened a roof to do it, and you called that faith. Forgive us for the invitations we have been drafting for years and never sent. Make us practical, make us specific, and make us easy to say no to. And keep us out of the doorway of other people. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"And when he saw their faith he said, Man, your sins are forgiven you."

Luke 5:20

MODULE 4 | PART THREE

Leader Reference Card

The Invitation

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

Passage	Where and why
Luke 5:17-26	Primary text, read aloud. Their faith, the roof, and the crowd.
Mark 2:3-4	Build 1 and 2. The four bearers and the digging out of the roof, which Luke does not give.
Luke 14:15-24	Primary text, read aloud. Three sendings and three excuses.
Luke 14:23	Live discovery. "Compel people to come in," and its reception history.
Acts 8:26-31	Dig Deeper. How can I, unless someone guides me.
John 1:39, 46	Dig Deeper. Come and see, twice.
Isaiah 25:6-8	Old Testament Roots. The feast on the mountain for all peoples.
Proverbs 9:1-6	Old Testament Roots. Wisdom sets her table and sends out her servants.
Isaiah 55:1-3	Old Testament Roots and Dig Deeper. Come, buy without money.

When Nothing Happens

Standalone Practicum Module · Mark 4:26-29; Luke 18:1-8; Isaiah 55:10-11; Habakkuk 2:1-3

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover from the one parable found only in St. Mark that the farmer sleeps, that the earth produces of itself, and that the man who scattered the seed does not know how it works. Then face honestly what Scripture does and does not promise about outcomes, and stop measuring the wrong thing.

Catholic Touchstone

Hope is not the same as presumption, and it is not the same as certainty about another person's future. The Church prays that no one be lost, has never declared that any particular person is in hell, and does not promise anyone that their prayers will produce a visible result on a schedule.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Who this module is for

The person who has prayed for someone for fifteen years. The parent whose adult child has not been to Mass since school. Anyone who has done every practice in the core study and has nothing to show for it.

This module runs a real risk of being falsely comforting, and false comfort is worse than none, because the people in this room have already been offered plenty of it and can smell it coming. Do not promise outcomes. What this module offers instead is a change in what is being measured.

The parable only St. Mark keeps

Mark 4:26-29. A man scatters seed on the ground, and sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, **he knows not how**. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle.

This is commonly identified as the only parable unique to St. Mark, and it is four verses long. The classification turns on how you treat passages like the watchful doorkeeper at Mark 13:34-37, so use the hedged form.

Track what the farmer does: he scatters, he sleeps, he rises, and eventually he harvests. The parable mentions nothing between the scattering and the harvest, which is not the same as saying nothing was done; a four-verse parable leaves out what is not its point. What it does say is that the earth produces of itself, and separately that the farmer does not know how. "The earth produces of itself" translates *automatē*, from which we get automatic.

And the phrase to take home is the middle one: he knows not how. That is not a failure of the farmer's education. It is the parable's point, and it is Jesus conceding, in his own words, that the mechanism is beyond the sower's explaining and his control. Be exact: it says he cannot account for it, not that he sees nothing. Verse 28 lists blade, ear and grain, which are visible.

The parable told specifically about this

Luke 18:1-8. St. Luke does something unusual and tells us the purpose before the story: he told them a parable "to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart."

The widow has no leverage and no influence over a corrupt judge. She does have a case, and she states it: vindicate me against my adversary. What she adds to it is that she keeps coming back, and the judge relents because of it.

And do not stop before verses 7 and 8, which carry a real promise: will not God vindicate his elect who cry to him day and night, and he will vindicate them speedily. Then the ending, which is not tidy: "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" A parable about persistence in prayer closes by asking whether he will find faith.

Jesus anticipated exactly the fatigue in your room and told a story about it, and did not promise the outcome would arrive on time.

What Isaiah 55 promises, and what it does not

Isaiah 55:10-11: as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but shall accomplish that which I purpose.

Read the promise carefully, because it is regularly overclaimed. It promises that God's word accomplishes God's purpose. It does not promise that it accomplishes your purpose, that it does so within your lifetime, or that you will see it.

Habakkuk 2:3 concerns a specific vision appointed for its time, and it is honest that the waiting is real. Take its wider use as an analogy rather than a promise about every unanswered prayer: if it seem slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. The prophet is told, in effect, that the delay is real and that it is not abandonment.

The hard part, which you must not skip

Sometimes it does not happen in this life. People die outside the visible communion of the Church, and the module fails the room if it pretends otherwise.

Here is what the Church actually says, and it is more than most people expect and less than they want. She prays that no one should be lost (CCC 1058). She teaches that God predestines no one to hell, and that a person goes there only by a free and persistent turning away (CCC 1037). She canonizes saints and has **never** declared that any particular human being is in hell. And she distinguishes hope, which is a theological virtue, from presumption, which is a sin against it (CCC 2091-2092).

That last distinction is the one to teach. We may hope, seriously and with our whole hearts, for any specific person. We may not claim to know. Those two things together are what the Church offers, and offered honestly they hold more weight than a false promise.

Have CCC 1821 in reach as well: we hope for the glory of heaven that God promises to those who love him and do his will, each of us hoping to persevere to the end, and the Church prays for all to be saved.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Twenty five years

Genesis 12:1-4 has the promise made to Abram at seventy-five. Genesis 21:5 has Isaac born when Abraham was a hundred. Twenty-five years between the promise and the child, with a badly handled detour in between. The Old Testament measures God's timelines in decades as a matter of routine.

The prophet who was told it would not work

Isaiah 6:9-13, which the core study meets at Session 9. Isaiah is sent to a people who will hear and not understand, and when he asks how long, the answer is: until the cities lie waste. And the last clause is that the holy seed is in the stump.

Forty years of being largely rejected

Jeremiah preached for roughly four decades, was largely rejected by the nation and its leaders, imprisoned, lowered into a cistern, and carried off to Egypt against his will. He was not wholly without hearers: Baruch, Ebed-melech and Ahikam all appear on his side, and the city fell exactly as he had said it would. Scripture does not treat his ministry as a failure. Anyone measuring by visible results would have to.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Teresa of Ávila, and a prayer traditionally hers

A short prayer is traditionally known as St. Teresa of Ávila's bookmark: let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you; all things are passing; God alone suffices; patience obtains all things.

The attribution is traditional, and the provenance details often repeated with it are not independently verified here, so present it as the prayer traditionally known as her bookmark rather than as a line from her writings. Either way, notice what it does not say. It does not say that what you are waiting for will arrive. It says that patience obtains, and that God is enough.

St. Teresa of Ávila, the prayer traditionally known as her bookmark. Traditional attribution, offered as such; the provenance details are not independently verified here.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Benedict XVI on what hope is not

Pope Benedict XVI opened his encyclical on hope with St. Paul's phrase that in hope we were saved, and argued that Christian hope is not optimism about how things will turn out, nor a calculation of probabilities, but a present reality resting on someone who is trustworthy.

That distinction is the whole module in a sentence. What you have is not a forecast about the person you are praying for. It is a relationship with the one you are praying to, and the difference is what makes it survivable over decades.

Pope Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi (2007), especially the opening paragraphs. Document-level citation; paragraph numbers should be verified before publication.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope St. Paul VI on the fatigue itself

In the closing section of Evangelii Nuntiandi, on the spirit in which evangelization must be carried out, Pope

St. Paul VI names the obstacle directly: a lack of fervour that shows itself in fatigue and disenchantment, in weariness, and in the loss of interior joy, and he treats it as a serious matter rather than a mood.

It is worth knowing that a pope wrote about this exact condition in a document about evangelization, and put it at the end rather than the beginning, where it belongs.

Pope St. Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi 80 (1975). Section-level citation.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

This is the part of the module people most need and least expect, and it is more precise than the reassurance they are usually given.

- **CCC 1058.** The Church prays that no one should be lost.
- **CCC 1037.** God predestines no one to hell; a willful turning away from God, persisted in to the end, is necessary. And note what the Church has never done: she canonizes saints and has never declared that any particular person is in hell.
- **CCC 1821.** We hope for the glory of heaven promised to those who love God and do his will, each of us hoping to persevere to the end, and the Church prays for all to be saved.
- **CCC 2090-2092.** Hope, and the two sins against it. Give the Catechism's definitions rather than paraphrasing: despair is ceasing to hope for one's own salvation, help or forgiveness; presumption is relying on one's own powers, or expecting forgiveness without conversion and glory without merit.
- **CCC 2725.** Prayer is a battle, against ourselves and against the tempter, and the Catechism says so plainly rather than promising it will feel productive.
- The suggestion to keep a written record over years is our practical device, not anything the Catechism prescribes.

LEADER NOTES

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Standalone module. It pairs with Session 9, which handled a specific refusal. This module handles years of nothing, which is a different problem and hurts differently.

The failure mode of this module is false comfort. The room can smell it, has been offered it before, and will disengage the moment it arrives. Promise nothing about outcomes. Change what is being measured instead.

Teach both sins against hope, in the Catechism's own terms. Despair is ceasing to hope for one's own salvation or forgiveness; presumption is relying on one's own powers or expecting glory without conversion. Do not redefine them as attitudes toward another person's fate; that is a separate point about the limits of what we can know.

Do not let anyone in the room pronounce on where a particular dead person is. Absent a canonization, no one should claim certainty about an individual's final state. The asymmetry matters: by canonization the Church does declare particular people to be in heaven, and she has never declared anyone to be in hell. If it comes up, CCC 1037 and 1058 are the whole answer.

Watch for the person who has stopped praying. They will not say so. The practicum is designed to find them without exposing them.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group find, from Mark 4:26-29, that the farmer sleeps and that the text says twice the growth is not his doing.
2. Land "he knows not how" as Christ conceding that the mechanism is hidden, rather than as a consolation prize.
3. Have them read Isaiah 55:11 precisely, and see what it does not promise.
4. Teach the Church's actual position on hoping for a particular person, including the distinction between hope and presumption.
5. Work the objection that "God's timing" is unfalsifiable, and concede the logical point honestly.
6. Have every person build a written record of what they have actually seen, which is almost always more than they remember.
7. Set a review date measured in years.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Win questions. Expect these to run; let them.
0:12-0:24	Read Mark 4:26-29 aloud twice. Build 1 and 2.
0:24-0:32	Build 3, Isaiah 55:10-11 and what it does not promise.
0:32-0:42	Live discovery: how long did the people in Scripture wait?
0:42-0:52	Build 4, Luke 18:1-8.
0:52-1:04	Build 5, the hard part. Give the Church's position precisely and do not soften it.
1:04-1:16	Build 6, the build-then-press on unfalsifiability.
1:16-1:28	Practicum: the record and the review date.
1:28-1:30	Take-homes and closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Fold Build 3 into Build 2 and make the Isaiah point in two sentences. Saves eight minutes.
- Run the discovery with Abraham and Jeremiah only. Saves five minutes.
- Cut Build 4 and put Luke 18:1-8 on the take-home. Saves ten minutes, and it is the cheapest cut here because Mark 4 carries the session.

- **Do not cut Build 5 or the practicum.** Build 5 is the only place in the whole study where the Church's teaching on hoping for a specific person is given, and the room needs it.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If someone asks directly whether a person who has died is saved, do not answer it and do not let the room answer it. Give CCC 1037 and CCC 1058: God predestines no one to hell, the Church prays that no one be lost, and she has never declared any particular person to be there. Then stop, and find that person afterward.

If someone has clearly given up praying and says so, receive it without any correction at all in the moment. The practicum will do more for them than you can in ninety seconds.

If the room starts trading reassurances, stop it once. Say plainly that the Church does not promise outcomes and that false comfort is worse than none. They will trust the module more afterward, not less.

If someone is angry at God about this, let them be. Habakkuk opens with lament and complaint to God and is not rebuked for it. Point at chapter 1 and move on.

This module can surface real depression rather than discouragement. If you see it, do not treat it as a spiritual problem to be solved in the room, and follow up privately.

Discussion Guide

When Nothing Happens

Mark 4:26-29; Luke 18:1-8; Isaiah 55:10-11; Habakkuk 2:1-3

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, some of us have been praying for the same person for longer than we have done anything else, and nothing has changed that we can see. We are tired and we have not stopped. Teach us what you actually promised and what you did not, and give us the patience of people who are not in charge of the harvest. Amen.

WIN

- ▶ What is the longest you have waited for anything that mattered?
- ▶ What have you given up on, and how did you know it was time?

BUILD

Read Mark 4:26-29 aloud twice. It is four verses, it is commonly identified as the only parable unique to St. Mark, and almost nobody in the room will be able to quote it from memory.

- 1. Mark 4:26-29. Make a list of everything the farmer does, in order. Then make a list of everything he does not do.**

ANSWER | share after the discussion

What he does: he scatters seed. He sleeps and rises, night and day. And when the grain is ripe, he puts in the sickle.

What the parable does not mention: any tending, watering, worrying or inspecting between the scattering and the harvest. He sleeps and rises. Note the limit: a four-verse parable omitting those things is not the same as saying they did not happen, and the point is the farmer's ignorance and lack of control rather than his idleness.

The text says the earth produces of itself, and separately that the farmer does not know how the seed grows. Those are two different claims, one about agency and one about his understanding, so do not collapse them into a single doubled statement. The Greek behind that phrase is *automatē*, from which we get automatic.

Ask the group how they feel about a parable in which the farmer sleeps, and whether they are able to.

- 2. Look at the middle of verse 27: "he knows not how." Why would Jesus put that in?**

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Because it is true, and because he is conceding it rather than being caught out by it. The mechanism is

hidden, and the parable says so in the Lord's own words.

This matters more than it looks. When somebody objects that they cannot account for what God is doing, the Christian answer is not that you can explain it if you think harder. It is that you were told in advance you would not be able to, by Christ, in a parable about exactly this. Note carefully what the parable does not say: verse 28 lists visible stages, so this is about explanation and control rather than about seeing nothing at all.

Notice also the sequence in verse 28: first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain. Growth is real and slow and staged, and none of the stages look like the harvest.

3. Isaiah 55:10-11. Read it carefully. What exactly is promised, and what is not?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Promised: that God's word does not return to him empty, and that it accomplishes that which he purposes and prospers in the thing for which he sent it.

Not promised: that it accomplishes **your** purpose. That it happens within your lifetime. That you will see it. That the person you are praying for is the thing it is accomplishing.

This verse is overclaimed constantly, usually kindly. Read it exactly as it stands and it is still enormous, and it is a different promise from the one people quote it as making.

Habakkuk 2:3 is the honest companion, and note its own reference: a vision appointed for its time. If it seem slow, wait for it. Its wider use here is analogy, not a promise covering every intercession. The prophet is told the delay is real, and that the delay is not abandonment. Those are not the same thing.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Send them looking, with a calculator if necessary.

Three assignments. First reader: Genesis 12:1-4, then Genesis 21:5. Second reader: Isaiah 6:9-13. Third reader: anything they can find about how long Jeremiah preached, starting from Jeremiah 1:2-3.

Then ask: how long did each of these people wait, and what did they see?

What they should find: Abram receives the promise at seventy-five and Isaac is born when he is a hundred. Twenty-five years, with a badly handled detour in the middle. Isaiah is sent to a people who will hear without understanding and see without perceiving, and asks how long, and is told: until the cities lie waste. Jeremiah's ministry spans roughly four decades across several kings; he was largely rejected, imprisoned, and lowered into a cistern, though Baruch, Ebed-melech and Ahikam stood with him, and the city fell exactly as he said it would.

Then ask the question that turns the module: by what measure was any of that a success at the time? And whose measure are we using on ourselves?

4. Luke 18:1-8. St. Luke tells us the purpose of the parable before he tells it. What is it, and how does the parable end?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The purpose, stated in verse 1: "to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart." St. Luke rarely does this, and here he does not want it missed.

The widow has no leverage and no influence over a corrupt judge, though she does have a case and states it plainly: vindicate me against my adversary. What she adds is that she keeps coming back, and he relents because of it.

Then read verses 7 and 8, which most treatments of this parable skip: God will vindicate his elect who cry to him day and night, and will do it speedily. That is a genuine promise, and it is a promise of God's vindication rather than a guarantee that a particular person will convert on our timetable. And the ending is not tidy: "when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Say the useful part plainly: the Lord anticipated the exact fatigue in this room and told a story about it. He did not promise that the answer would arrive on schedule. He told them not to lose heart, which is only ever said to people at risk of it.

5. The hard question. Some people die without ever coming back. What does the Church actually say?

Leader: give this precisely. More is at stake in the wording here than anywhere else in the module.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

She says less than people want and more than they expect, and the precision is the comfort.

CCC 1058: the Church prays that no one should be lost.

CCC 1037: God predestines no one to hell. Going there requires a willful turning away from God, persisted in to the end.

And a fact about her practice: the Church canonizes saints, declaring with authority that particular people are in heaven. She has never once declared that any particular human being is in hell. Not one.

CCC 2090-2092: hope, and the two sins against it, and the Catechism's own definitions matter here. Despair is ceasing to hope for one's own salvation from God, for his help in attaining it, or for the forgiveness of one's sins. Presumption takes two forms: presuming on one's own powers, or presuming on God's mercy so as to expect forgiveness without conversion and glory without merit. Neither of those is the same as pronouncing on somebody else's eternal fate, which is a separate matter and simply exceeds what we are given to know.

So here is the position, and hold both halves. You may hope, seriously and with your whole heart, for any particular person, living or dead. You may not claim to know. Absent a canonization, anyone who tells you they know has gone past what the Church says. Note the asymmetry: she does declare particular saints to be in heaven, and has never declared anyone to be in hell.

That is less than a promise. It is also a great deal more than nothing, and it is true, which is the only kind of comfort that survives ten years.

6. Someone says: "God's timing" is unfalsifiable. It is built so it can never be wrong. Twenty years of nothing, and the answer is always wait longer. At some point this is a refusal to accept reality. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below, and notice that the first move is to concede the logic rather than dispute it.

DIG DEEPER

Habakkuk 1. The prophet opens with lament: he has cried for help and has not been heard, and he asks how long. He is not rebuked for it. Anyone in your group who is angry about this has a book of the Bible that starts near where they are.

Jeremiah's career. Roughly four decades across several kings: largely rejected by the nation and its leaders, imprisoned, lowered into a cistern, and finally carried into Egypt against his will. Baruch, Ebed-melech and Ahikam are the exceptions worth naming. Scripture does not treat it as a failed ministry, and no visible metric of his own time would have agreed.

The stump. Isaiah 6:13 ends the hardest commission in Scripture with the note that the holy seed is in the stump. Not a harvest. A stump with something alive in it.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it at full strength. It is the sharpest objection in the whole study and it deserves a serious answer rather than a warm one.

The logical point is correct. "God is working in ways you cannot see" cannot be disproved by any observation whatsoever. No amount of nothing counts against it. That is the structure of an unfalsifiable claim, and a person who deploys it glibly has earned the objection.

And build the strong form rather than the weak one. The objector need not claim that nothing will ever happen. They can simply suspend judgment, decline to believe in hidden activity they have no evidence for, and adjust what they do accordingly. That is a reasonable position, and it is harder to answer than the flat denial.

And it has real costs. It can keep somebody praying for forty years while never asking whether they should change anything, and it can be used to avoid an honest reckoning with a relationship that has been damaged by our own conduct.

It can also be cruel. Told to a grieving parent, "God is working" can function as an instruction not to feel what they feel, and as a reason never to say out loud that they are angry.

And the strongest version: an unfalsifiable claim is exactly what you would expect a religion to produce to keep people from leaving. That is not a stupid suspicion. It is a reasonable one.

Then press, from the text:

Now press.

First, concede the logic, out loud and without qualification. The objector is right that the claim cannot be falsified from where we stand. Any Catholic who pretends otherwise is bluffing, and the person across the table will know.

Second, answer the strongest version rather than a weaker one. The skeptic need not claim that nothing will

ever happen; they can simply suspend judgment and act on the evidence they have, which is a reasonable position and not a bluff. What Christian perseverance rests on is not evidence of hidden change in this particular person. It rests on revelation and on trust in the God who gives the growth. Say that plainly rather than trying to win on evidential ground you do not hold. And if someone does assert that nothing will ever happen, note that this is a claim about another person's future that they have no access to either.

Third, notice that Scripture concedes the point rather than hiding it. Mark 4:27: **he knows not how**. The hiddenness of the mechanism is not an apologetic patch invented when the results did not arrive. It is in the parable, in the Lord's own words, before anyone had a reason to need it.

Fourth, Luke 18:1. Jesus told a parable specifically so that people would pray and not lose heart, which means he expected the losing of heart, and he expected it to be reasonable.

Fifth, be honest about what is actually promised. Isaiah 55:11 promises that God's word accomplishes God's purpose. It never promised you would see it, or that it would be your purpose. If we stopped overclaiming that verse, the objection would have less to bite on.

And then give the objector the concession that matters most. They are right that "wait longer" can be a way of never examining anything. So examine it. Is there something you have done that needs an apology? Has your praying turned into managing? Have you confused praying for someone with waiting for them to admit you were right? Those are real questions, and the module before this one asked them.

The measurement changes rather than the effort. Luke 10:20 already moved the joy off the results, and this is the week that costs something.

SEND

- ▶ What have you actually seen in the last five years, however small? Not what you hoped for. What you saw.
- ▶ What are you measuring, and who told you to measure that?

PRACTICUM

PRACTICUM | the record and the review date

PRACTICUM: the record. Twelve minutes, individual and silent for most of it.

Step one, seven minutes of silence. On paper, one person's name at the top. Then list every single thing you have observed since you started praying for them. Every one, however small, and do not filter for significance.

Prompts, because people underestimate this badly: a conversation that went differently than usual. A question they asked. A funeral or a wedding they came to. A time they did not change the subject. Something they said about their childhood. A crisis they told you about first. A softening you noticed and dismissed.

Step two, two minutes. Count the items. Almost everyone will have more than they expected, and some will have none, and both are real findings. Nobody reads their list aloud.

Step three, two minutes. At the bottom of the page, write a review date. Not next month. Pick a date two years from today and write it down, and put it in your calendar before you leave the room.

Step four, one minute. Underneath the date, write one sentence: what I will look at on that day. Our suggestion, and it is only ours: look at whether **you** changed, not whether they did.

Debrief, whole group, two questions only. Did anyone find more on their list than they expected? And is there anyone whose list is empty?

Leader guidance. The empty list is the important one and the person will not want to say so. Have this ready: an empty list is not evidence that nothing is happening. Mark 4 says the growth runs beyond the sower's explaining and beyond his control, and verse 28 says the stages that do appear are blade, then ear, then grain, none of which looks like harvest. It is evidence that you have been carrying this without any encouragement at all for a long time, which is a heavier thing than most people around you realize. Say that, and then move on quickly so they are not looked at.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

The next two years. Keep going, and stop measuring the wrong thing.

- Keep praying for them by name, daily. Nothing in this module reduces that.
- Keep the list. Add to it when something happens, even something you would normally dismiss. Two years of small entries reads very differently from two years of memory.
- Put the review date in your calendar tonight, not tomorrow.
- Once this week, say out loud to God the honest thing, unfiltered. Habakkuk opened his book with lament and complaint and was not rebuked for it.
- And ask one honest question: is there anything I have done in this relationship that needs an apology rather than more prayer?
- **If what surfaced tonight was heavier than discouragement, tell somebody this week.** Sustained hopelessness is worth talking to a doctor or a counsellor about, and not only to a priest.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you told us about a man who scattered seed and then went to sleep, and you said plainly that he did not know how any of it worked. Give us that sleep. Take from us the need to see it, and keep us from both despair and from pretending we know how it ends. We will keep saying their names. Do what we cannot. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"And should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how."

Mark 4:27

Leader Reference Card

When Nothing Happens

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

Passage	Where and why
Mark 4:26-29	Primary text, read aloud twice. The only parable found in St. Mark alone.
Luke 18:1-8	Build 4. The purpose stated first, and the question at the end.
Isaiah 55:10-11	Build 3. What is promised and what is not.
Habakkuk 2:1-3	Build 3. If it seem slow, wait for it.
Habakkuk 1:1-4	Dig Deeper. The prophet complains and is not rebuked.
Genesis 12:1-4; Genesis 21:5	Live discovery. Twenty-five years between the promise and Isaac.
Isaiah 6:9-13	Live discovery and Dig Deeper. Sent to people who will not listen, and the holy seed in the stump.
Jeremiah 1:2-3	Live discovery. The span of a ministry nobody listened to.
Luke 10:20	Build 6, the press. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.