

A CATHOLIC INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Emmanuel

A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

“His name shall be called Emmanuel” (which means, God with us). Matthew 1:23

“And behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” Matthew 28:20

Fourteen Sessions for Young Adult Small Groups
Inductive Format · 90 Minutes per Session · RSV, Second Catholic Edition

Using This Guide

What This Study Is

Emmanuel is a fourteen-session inductive journey through the entire Gospel of Matthew for young adult small groups, built on a simple conviction: people believe what they discover more deeply than what they are told. Nearly every major finding in this study is designed to be made by the participants themselves, with Bibles open, before the leader confirms it. The study is fully Catholic in doctrine, honest about open questions, and unafraid of the strongest objections to the faith, which it presents at full strength before answering them from the text.

The Three Parts of Each Session

- **Leader Preparation Guide.** Read this during the week before the session: the discovery aim, essential background, Old Testament roots, three verified Voices of the Church, Catechism connections, the thread watch, session goals, and a 90-minute timing plan with pre-chosen cuts if you run long.
- **Discussion Guide.** The session itself: an opening prayer, two open Win questions, an inductive Build with numbered questions and shaded ANSWER boxes (share the answer only after the group has worked the question), live discovery moments where participants find the source passages themselves, build-then-press steelman chains, Dig Deeper boxes, two Send questions, Live It This Week practices, a closing prayer, and a Scripture memory verse.
- **Leader Reference Card.** Every passage used in the session, in order, on one card, so you can set bookmarks or assign finders in advance.

Take-Home Sheets

Each session has a two-page Take-Home sheet distributed AFTER the session ends, never before. It recaps what the group found, carries that session's three Voices of the Church, the full Live It This Week, the memory verse, the next week's reading, and the Catechism references. Take-Home 1 carries the sealed My Guess box; guard its instructions carefully. Take-Home sheets never contain answers to undiscovered questions, upcoming discovery passages, or steelman material, so they are always safe to hand out.

The Steelman Method

Every session but the last includes a build-then-press chain engaging a serious Protestant (or, in the final session, skeptical) reading of that week's text. The objection is always presented first, at full strength, in its most sympathetic form, and the group is invited to feel its force before answering it from Scripture, history, and the Church's constant faith. Where the Church has not defined a matter, the study says so; where scholars genuinely debate, the study says that too. This honesty is not a courtesy; it is the method. Participants who watch the strongest objection answered fairly will trust the answer, and will know how to have the same conversation kindly with a Protestant friend.

The Threads

Several threads are planted early and resolved on schedule across the fourteen weeks: the Emmanuel thread (the master thread, resolved in the final minutes of Session 14), the fulfillment citations count, the Son of David thread, the New Israel and New Moses pattern, the bread thread, the cup, the sign of Jonah, and Daniel

7. Trust the architecture: when a thread note says plant silently, plant silently. The payoffs depend on the patience.

The Sealed Guess

At the end of Session 1, every participant writes and seals an answer to one question: “Who do you say Jesus is, and how will the world come to know him?” It is not discussed. It opens in Session 8 at Caesarea Philippi, is rewritten that night, and both versions return for the final ceremony in Session 14. Announce the bring-your-sheet instructions exactly where the guides indicate, and answer no questions about why.

Practical Notes

- Sessions are built for 90 minutes. Each timing plan names its cuts in order; take them from the top and never cut a steelman, a sealed guess step, or a live discovery.
- All Scripture is from the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition. Have several Bibles at the table; live discovery requires them.
- Session 13, the Passion, is deliberately different in tone: quieter, slower, ending in timed silence. Read its leader notes early in the week.
- The Voices of the Church are faithful paraphrases of verified works of the Fathers and Doctors, with sources named; they may be read aloud as written.

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Son of David, Son of Abraham

Matthew 1–2 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that Matthew opens his Gospel by gathering up the whole story of Israel and pointing it at one child. The covenant promises to Abraham and to David converge on Jesus, and his two names announce everything that follows: Jesus tells us what he will do, save his people from their sins, and Emmanuel tells us who he is, God with us.

Catholic Touchstone. The virginal conception and Mary's perpetual virginity. The Church reads Matthew 1–2 as the hinge where Old Covenant promise becomes New Covenant presence, and this session lets the group meet the perpetual virginity question honestly and from the text itself.

What You Need to Know

Matthew's opening words, *biblos geneleos* ("the book of the genealogy"), deliberately echo Genesis 2:4 and 5:1 in the Greek Old Testament. Before a single event is narrated, Matthew is claiming that a new creation, a new Genesis, begins with this child. The genealogy is not throat clearing before the story; it is the first theological statement of the Gospel. It establishes Jesus' legal claim to David's throne through Joseph, his adoptive father. In Jewish practice, a father's acknowledgment of a child has long been understood to establish legal sonship, with its inheritance and dynastic rights, even apart from biological descent. On that understanding the virginal conception does not weaken the royal claim; Joseph's naming of the child (1:25) publicly claims him as his son.

Matthew arranges the names in three sets of fourteen (1:17): from Abraham the story rises to David and kingship, from David it decays into exile, and from exile it waits in silence for the Messiah. The structure preaches. Israel's history is not a random list; it has a shape, and the shape bends toward Christ.

Four women appear before Mary: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah. Each is a Gentile or is bound up with the Gentile world, and each carries a story shadowed by scandal or irregularity. Matthew includes them on purpose. Grace has always run through crooked lines, the nations have always been in view, and the reader is being prepared for the greatest irregularity of all, a virgin with child by the Holy Spirit.

Joseph's justice is revealed in his refusal to expose Mary publicly (1:19). The tradition holds two permissible readings of his interior state: many understand his resolve as mercy toward one he believed guilty, while other Fathers and Doctors, including Origen, St. Bernard, and St. Thomas Aquinas, held that Joseph already perceived the mystery before him and withdrew in humble reverence, judging himself unworthy to take the mother of his Lord into his home. Neither reading is condemned; present the question as open. Either way, his four dreams in these chapters recall the earlier Joseph, the dreamer of Genesis, through whom God brought his family down into Egypt to save it.

Four times in these two chapters Matthew uses his signature formula, that something happened “to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet” (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23), and a fifth Old Testament citation, the chief priests' quotation of Micah (2:5-6), stands alongside them. This fulfillment thread runs the length of the Gospel. Note that fulfillment for Matthew is richer than simple prediction and result; Jesus takes up Israel's whole story, its exodus, its exile, its tears, and relives it faithfully. That is why Hosea 11:1, which in context is about the nation of Israel, can be fulfilled in Jesus. He is the New Israel in person.

The Magi episode sets three postures before us: Herod is threatened by the true King, the chief priests know the correct answer from Micah and never make the short walk to Bethlehem, and pagan stargazers with imperfect knowledge do everything right, they seek, they find, they worship, they give. Matthew's first worshippers of the Jewish Messiah are Gentiles, a quiet overture to the Great Commission.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Genesis 22:15–18.** The oath to Abraham: in his seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Matthew 1:1 claims that seed has arrived.
- **2 Samuel 7:12–14.** The promise to David of an everlasting throne for his son. The genealogy is Matthew's legal brief that Jesus holds this claim.
- **Isaiah 7:14.** The Emmanuel sign given to faithless King Ahaz. Matthew 1:23 declares its deepest fulfillment: the virgin's son is God with us in person.
- **Micah 5:2.** Bethlehem, little among the clans of Judah, will produce the ruler of Israel. The chief priests quote it to Herod without ever acting on it.
- **Hosea 11:1.** “Out of Egypt I called my son.” In Hosea this is Israel at the Exodus; in Matthew 2:15 it is Jesus, the New Israel, recapitulating his people's story.
- **Jeremiah 31:15.** Rachel weeping for her children. Matthew draws it from the very chapter that promises the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31), so even this citation of grief secretly carries hope.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

Chrysostom marvels that the evangelist hides none of the sins of Jesus' ancestors, naming the scandals of Tamar and of David openly. The Physician of souls, he says, was not ashamed of the family he entered; he came precisely to heal the wounded line, and the honesty of the genealogy is itself good news for sinners who fear their past disqualifies them.

Voices of the Church: St. Jerome (Against Helvidius)

Answering the claim that Matthew 1:25 implies Mary later had other children, Jerome shows from Scripture's own usage that “until” marks a point of emphasis without asserting anything about what follows it, and that “brothers” in the biblical idiom regularly means kinsmen. He defends Mary's perpetual virginity as the constant faith of the Church, not a later sentiment.

Voices of the Church: St. Leo the Great (Sermons on the Epiphany)

Leo sees in the Magi the firstfruits of the nations, our own ancestors in faith walking ahead of us to Bethlehem. In their three gifts the whole mystery of Christ is already confessed: gold for the King, incense for God, and myrrh for the Man who would die and be buried.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 430.** The name Jesus means “God saves”; the name expresses both his identity and his mission, exactly as the angel explains in Matthew 1:21.
- **CCC 496–497.** The Church has always confessed that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin; the Gospel accounts, including Matthew 1:18–25, present this as a divine work beyond human understanding.
- **CCC 500.** The “brothers” of Jesus named in the Gospel are close relations, not other children of Mary; Matthew himself identifies James and Joseph as sons of another Mary (Matthew 27:56).
- **CCC 528.** The Epiphany is the manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God, and Savior of the world; in the Magi the pagan nations discover him and represent the beginning of the Gospel's reach to all peoples.

Thread Watch

- **The Emmanuel thread (plant).** Matthew 1:23 names Jesus “God with us.” Watch across the study for presence language, for where and how Jesus promises to remain with his people. This thread resolves in the final session.
- **The fulfillment thread (plant).** Five Old Testament citations appear in these two chapters alone, four of them carrying Matthew's fulfillment formula. Invite the group to keep an informal count as the study proceeds and to notice what kinds of Scripture Jesus fulfills.
- **The Son of David thread (plant).** Track who calls Jesus “Son of David” in this Gospel and what they ask of him. The pattern will matter when he enters Jerusalem.
- **Sealed guess (plant).** At the end of this session each participant writes and seals a guess on Take-Home Sheet 1: “Who do you say Jesus is, and how will the world come to know him?” It is not discussed tonight. It opens in Session 8 at Caesarea Philippi.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain why Matthew opens with a genealogy and what the titles “son of David” and “son of Abraham” each claim.
2. Participants discover the Abrahamic and Davidic promises in the Old Testament for themselves and connect them to Matthew 1:1.
3. Participants can articulate the meaning of the two names, Jesus and Emmanuel, and begin watching the Emmanuel thread.

4. Participants hear the strongest Protestant reading of Matthew 1:25 and can answer it honestly from Scripture and the Church's constant faith.

5. Participants contrast the Magi, Herod, and the chief priests as three postures toward Christ, and each writes and seals the study's opening guess.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Sealed guess 5 min · Send and Live It 10 min · Prayer 5 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: drop the Dig Deeper box on the number fourteen (saves about 5 minutes), then use only the first Win question (saves about 5 minutes). Do not cut the steelman chain or the sealed guess; both carry weight for later sessions.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 1 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Son of David, Son of Abraham

Matthew 1–2 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Father, before we knew you, you knew us. You wrote your promises into history one generation at a time until, in the fullness of time, you gave us your Son. Open the Scriptures to us tonight, and open us to the Scriptures. Let us find Jesus where you have always placed him, at the center of the whole story, and finding him, let us worship like the Magi and not merely know like the scribes. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Share a story your family tells about where you come from. What does that story say about who you are?
2. When has someone's simple presence, just being with you, made more difference than anything they could have said or done?

Build (55 minutes)

The First Verse of the New Testament

1. Have someone read Matthew 1:1 aloud, slowly. What three titles or identifiers does Matthew give Jesus in this one verse? Why might he choose to lead with exactly these?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One), son of David, son of Abraham. Matthew leads with a legal and theological claim before any narrative. His Greek opening, *biblos geneseos*, echoes the wording of Genesis, signaling that a new creation begins here. The genealogy that follows establishes Jesus' royal claim to David's throne through Joseph, his legal father.

2. **Live discovery.** Split into two groups. Group one finds God's oath to Abraham in Genesis 22:15–18. Group two finds God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12–14. Each group reports: what exactly did God promise, and what would it take for both promises to come true in one person?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

To Abraham: that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. To David: a son whose throne would be established forever. Matthew 1:1 claims both lines of promise converge on Jesus. The rest of the Gospel unpacks both, a royal Messiah for Israel whose kingdom reaches every nation, which is exactly where Matthew will end.

A Genealogy with a Shape

3. Read Matthew 1:17. How does Matthew organize the names? What are the two hinge points he chooses, and what does the shape of the list say about Israel's story?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Three sets of fourteen generations, hinged at David and at the exile. The story rises from Abraham to kingship, collapses from kingship into exile, and then waits. The genealogy preaches: history has a direction, and its direction is Christ.

Dig Deeper: Why Fourteen?

In Hebrew, letters carry number values, and the letters of David's name add up to fourteen. Many commentators, ancient and modern, hear Matthew signing David's name over the whole list three times. Matthew never says this explicitly, so hold it lightly, but it fits how carefully this Gospel is built.

4. Look at the women Matthew names before Mary: Tamar (1:3), Rahab and Ruth (1:5), and the wife of Uriah (1:6). What do these four have in common, and why would Matthew include them in the Messiah's family tree?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Each is a Gentile or is bound up with the Gentile world, and each story carries irregularity or scandal that a tidy official genealogy would omit. Matthew includes them deliberately. God's grace has always worked through crooked lines and unexpected outsiders, the nations were always in view, and the reader is being prepared for the most unexpected mother of all, a virgin with child by the Holy Spirit.

Two Names, One Child

5. Read Matthew 1:18–25. What crisis does Joseph face, and how does the angel resolve it? Then look at the two names given to the child in this passage. **Live discovery:** have someone find the prophecy Matthew quotes in verse 23 in its original home, Isaiah 7:14. What does each name announce?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Joseph, a just man, resolves to end the betrothal quietly rather than expose Mary; the angel reveals that the child is conceived by the Holy Spirit. The name Jesus (“the Lord saves”) announces his mission: he will save his people from their sins, a claim only God can make good on. The name Emmanuel announces his identity: God with us. Isaiah spoke the sign to faithless King Ahaz seven centuries earlier; Matthew declares its fullest meaning has arrived in person.

Build Then Press: Did Mary Have Other Children?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

Verse 25 says Joseph “knew her not until she had borne a son.” In plain modern English, “until”

suggests that afterward the marriage was ordinary. Later, in Matthew 13:55, the townspeople name James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas as Jesus' brothers. Put those together and many sincere, Bible-loving Protestants conclude that Mary and Joseph had other children, and they reach that conclusion from the text, not from any desire to dishonor Mary. Let the group feel the force of this reading before answering it.

6. Now press on the reading from Scripture itself. Does “until” in the Bible assert what happens after the limit it names? **Live discovery:** have someone read Matthew 28:20 and someone else read 2 Samuel 6:23. Then ask: in biblical usage, who can “brothers” include? Check Genesis 13:8 and 14:14, where the RSV2CE calls Lot, Abraham's nephew, his “kinsman”; the Hebrew word in both verses is *ach*, the ordinary word for brother, which the translators render “kinsman” precisely because the biblical word is broader than blood sibling. Finally, compare Matthew 13:55 with Matthew 27:56, then 27:61 and 28:1. Whose sons are James and Joseph?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Biblical “until” (*heos hou* in Greek) affirms something up to a point without claiming reversal after it. Jesus is with us “to the close of the age,” and certainly not absent afterward; Michal had no child “to the day of her death,” and obviously none after. Matthew 1:25 asserts the virginal conception, that Joseph had no part in this child, and asserts nothing beyond it.

Likewise *adelphoi* in the biblical idiom covers kinsmen broadly, as with Lot, whom the Hebrew text literally calls Abram's brother. And Matthew quietly gives us a key himself: the James and Joseph of 13:55 appear at the cross in 27:56 as sons of a Mary whom Matthew does not call the mother of Jesus, and whom he then twice names simply “the other Mary” (27:61; 28:1). Reading these verses together, the Church has always identified her as a different Mary (CCC 500). The honest conclusion: Scripture does not settle this question in isolation with the clarity some imagine, which is precisely why the witness of the apostolic Church matters. This is not a stalemate; it is how the Bible was always meant to be read. From the earliest centuries, in East and West alike, the Church confessed Mary ever-virgin, and St. Jerome answered this exact objection in the fourth century. We are not correcting the Bible; we are reading it with the family that wrote it down, and that family has never read it Helvidius' way.

Three Postures Before the King

7. Read Matthew 2:1–12. **Live discovery:** the chief priests answer Herod with a prophecy; have someone find and read it in Micah 5:2. Now name the three responses to the newborn King in this scene. What separates the Magi from the scribes?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Herod is threatened and schemes. The chief priests and scribes know the right answer, chapter and verse, and never make the five-mile walk to Bethlehem. Pagan stargazers with imperfect knowledge do everything right: they seek, they find, they fall down and worship, they give. Knowing about Christ is not the same as coming to him. In their gifts the Church has long seen a confession: gold for a king, frankincense for God, myrrh for a man born to die.

8. Read Matthew 2:13–23. Live discovery: Matthew says the flight to Egypt fulfills a prophet; have someone find Hosea 11:1 and read the surrounding verses. In Hosea, who is “my son” called out of Egypt? What is Matthew claiming by applying those words to Jesus?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

In Hosea, the son called out of Egypt is Israel at the Exodus. Matthew is claiming that Jesus is the New Israel in person, taking up his people's whole story and living it faithfully where Israel failed: down into Egypt, up through the water, into the wilderness, and onto a mountain to give God's teaching, all of which the group will watch unfold in the next sessions. Even the citation of Rachel weeping comes from Jeremiah 31, the very chapter that promises the New Covenant, so the tears themselves carry hope.

Sealed Guess (5 minutes)

Hand out Take-Home Sheet 1. Ask each person to find the My Guess box and write, privately and without discussion: “Who do you say Jesus is, and how will the world come to know him?” Then fold that section closed and write their name on the outside. Collect nothing; they keep it. Tell them only this: the question comes from a scene later in this Gospel, and the box opens when we reach it.

Send (10 minutes)

1. Matthew names real, flawed people in Jesus' family line and hides nothing. Where do you need to believe that God can work through the crooked lines of your own story?
2. The Magi moved; the scribes stayed home with the right answer. What is one concrete step toward Christ that you have known about for a while and not yet taken?

Live It This Week

- Each morning, pray the Holy Name slowly, “Jesus, save me from my sins,” and let the name mean what the angel said it means.
- Read Matthew 1–2 once more on your own, marking every place Matthew quotes the Old Testament. Bring your count next week.
- Practice Emmanuel: give someone the gift of unhurried presence this week, a visit, a call, a meal, with your phone out of reach.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham, Son of the living God: you did not stay distant from our history, you entered it. Be Emmanuel for us this week, God with us in our homes, our work, and our waiting. Give us the feet of the Magi and not the seats of the scribes, and bring us back together to open your word again. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 1:23 (RSV2CE): *“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel” (which means, God with us).*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 1 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

Son of David, Son of Abraham · Matthew 1–2

Primary Text

• Matthew 1:1 · Matthew 1:3, 5, 6 · Matthew 1:17 · Matthew 1:18–25 · Matthew 1:23 · Matthew 2:1–12 · Matthew 2:13–23

Live Discovery Passages

• Genesis 22:15–18 (oath to Abraham) · 2 Samuel 7:12–14 (promise to David) · Isaiah 7:14 (Emmanuel sign) · Micah 5:2 (Bethlehem) · Hosea 11:1 (out of Egypt) · Matthew 28:20 and 2 Samuel 6:23 (biblical “until”) · Genesis 13:8 and 14:14 (kinsmen as “brothers”) · Matthew 13:55 with Matthew 27:56, 61 and 28:1 (the other Mary)

Background Passages

• Genesis 2:4; 5:1 (book of the genealogy) · Jeremiah 31:15 and 31:31 (Rachel's weeping and the New Covenant)

Catechism

• CCC 430 · CCC 496–497 · CCC 500 · CCC 528

Memory Verse

• Matthew 1:23

The New Exodus Begins

Matthew 3–4 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that Jesus deliberately relives Israel's story and gets it right where Israel got it wrong: through the water, into the wilderness for forty days, tested at exactly the points where Israel fell, and answering every temptation from Deuteronomy, Israel's own wilderness book. At the Jordan the Trinity is manifest, and the Father names Jesus his beloved Son.

Catholic Touchstone. The baptism of the Lord and its meaning for our baptism. Christ does not need John's baptism; John's baptism needs Christ. By going down into the water the sinless One begins to fill baptism with the power it will carry in his Church.

What You Need to Know

John the Baptist appears in the wilderness dressed like Elijah (compare 2 Kings 1:8), preaching at the Jordan, the very river Israel crossed to enter the promised land. Matthew frames him with Isaiah 40:3, the great announcement of the return from exile. The geography preaches: if Israel's story stalled in exile at the end of the genealogy, the action resumes exactly where entries into the land begin, at the Jordan.

Jesus' baptism raises the question John himself asks: why does the sinless One come to a baptism of repentance? Jesus answers, "to fulfil all righteousness" (3:15). He is not confessing sin; he is standing with sinners, identifying with the people he came to save, and beginning to transform John's symbolic washing into something far greater. The Fathers loved to say that Christ did not need cleansing from the waters; the waters needed cleansing from Christ. Note what happens the moment he comes up: the heavens open, the Spirit descends, the Father speaks. This is the first explicit manifestation of the Trinity in the Gospel, and it is also the pattern of every Christian baptism: sonship declared, the Spirit given, heaven opened.

The Father's words braid together Psalm 2:7 (the royal Davidic son), Isaiah 42:1 (the suffering Servant), and an echo of Genesis 22:2 (Abraham's beloved son). In one sentence the voice from heaven joins King, Servant, and beloved-son-offered, a compressed preview of the whole Gospel.

Immediately the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness for forty days, as Israel spent forty years. The three temptations map onto Israel's three great wilderness failures: bread (grumbling for food, Exodus 16), putting God to the test (Massah, Exodus 17), and false worship (the golden calf, Exodus 32). Jesus answers all three from Deuteronomy 6–8, the section of Moses' sermon that interprets those very failures. Where the first Adam fell in a garden of plenty and Israel fell in the desert, the New Israel stands. He is not merely resisting sin; he is rewriting the story from inside.

The tempter's opening move deserves attention: "If you are the Son of God" (4:3, 6) attacks the very words the Father just spoke at the Jordan. Temptation typically begins by questioning our identity as

beloved sons and daughters. Jesus never argues about his identity; he stands on the word of God and answers from it.

Jesus then withdraws to Galilee, fulfilling Isaiah 9:1–2, light dawning on “Galilee of the Gentiles.” The Abrahamic, all-nations side of Matthew 1:1 is already stirring. His first word of preaching repeats John's exactly, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” and his first act is to call disciples, ordinary fishermen, with a promise to remake them: fishers of men.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Isaiah 40:3.** The voice in the wilderness announcing the end of exile. Matthew applies it to John: the long wait of the genealogy's third panel is over.
- **Psalms 2:7, Isaiah 42:1, Genesis 22:2.** The three strands braided into the Father's voice at the baptism: Davidic King, Servant of the Lord, beloved son.
- **Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:16; 6:13.** Jesus' three answers in the desert, all drawn from Moses' interpretation of Israel's wilderness failures.
- **Exodus 16; 17:1–7; 32.** The failures behind the temptations: bread, testing God at Massah, false worship.
- **Isaiah 9:1–2.** Light dawning in Galilee of the Gentiles; the nations are in view from the first day of the public ministry.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Gregory Nazianzen (Oration 39, On the Holy Lights)

Gregory preaches that Christ is baptized so that we might go down into the water with him and come up with him, buried with him in the water so as to rise with him. The Light needed no cleansing, but he sanctified the Jordan for our sake and made water the beginning of new birth.

Voices of the Church: St. Gregory the Great (Homilies on the Gospels)

Gregory observes that the ancient enemy tempted the Lord by the same three approaches through which he conquered the first man: gluttony, vainglory, and avarice. Christ overcame him with the patience of the word of God rather than a display of power, teaching us how the battle is fought.

Voices of the Church: St. Hilary of Poitiers (Commentary on Matthew)

Hilary reads the events at the Jordan as a mystery of our own baptism: the heavens are opened, the Spirit descends, and the Father's voice declares sonship. What was manifested over Christ is bestowed on the baptized, who become sons in the Son.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 535–537.** The baptism of Jesus as his acceptance of his mission and the manifestation of the Trinity; in baptism the Christian is united to Christ's own descent and rising.
- **CCC 538–540.** The temptations recapitulate the trials of Adam and of Israel; Jesus is the New Adam and the true Israel who fulfills Israel's vocation in the desert.
- **CCC 1223–1225.** All Old Covenant prefigurations of baptism are fulfilled in Christ, who begins his public life by being baptized and in his Passover opens the fountain of baptism to all.

Thread Watch

- **Emmanuel thread (develop).** At the Jordan, God-with-us stands in the water with sinners, and the Father, Son, and Spirit are manifest together. Presence is becoming visible.
- **New Israel thread (develop).** Planted in Session 1 with Hosea 11:1, the pattern now unfolds exactly as promised: Egypt, water, wilderness. Next stop, a mountain. Say nothing yet; let the group see it coming.
- **Fulfillment thread (develop).** Two more fulfillment citations appear (3:3 and 4:14–16). Ask for the running count.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain why the sinless Christ received John's baptism and what his baptism means for ours.
2. Participants identify the Trinity manifest at the Jordan and the three Old Testament strands in the Father's voice.
3. Participants discover for themselves that all three of Jesus' answers come from Deuteronomy and map onto Israel's wilderness failures.
4. Participants hear the strongest Protestant case for purely symbolic baptism and can answer it from Matthew's own text.
5. Participants recognize the pattern of temptation that begins by attacking identity, and Christ's model of answering from the word of God.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: drop the Dig Deeper box on Elijah's clothing (saves about 4 minutes), then compress Build question 7 on the call of the disciples into a single read-and-comment (saves about 6 minutes). Do not cut the Deuteronomy discovery or the steelman chain.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 2 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The New Exodus Begins

Matthew 3–4 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Father, at the Jordan you tore open the heavens and named your Son beloved. In our baptism you spoke the same word over each of us. Send your Spirit on this circle tonight; lead us into your word as you led your Son into the wilderness, and teach us to answer every lie with your truth. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. What do you know about the day of your own baptism? If you know nothing, who could you ask this week?
2. Think of a time you were tested right after a high point, a success, a retreat, a fresh start. Why do you think it so often works that way?

Build (55 minutes)

The Voice at the Jordan

1. Read Matthew 3:1–12. Where is John, what is he wearing, and what is he doing? **Live discovery:** have someone find the prophecy Matthew quotes in Isaiah 40:1–5 and read it with the verses around it. What was Isaiah announcing, and what is Matthew claiming by applying it to John?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

John preaches at the Jordan, the river Israel crossed to enter the land, dressed like Elijah the prophet (2 Kings 1:8). Isaiah 40 announces the end of the exile, comfort for Jerusalem, and a highway for the return of the Lord himself. Matthew's claim is enormous: the exile that ended the genealogy's second panel is finally, truly over, and the One returning on that highway is the Lord.

Dig Deeper: Why Dress Like Elijah?

Malachi 4:5 promised that Elijah would come before the great day of the Lord. John's camel hair and leather belt are a costume with a message, and Jesus will confirm the identification later in this Gospel (11:14). Watch for it.

2. Read Matthew 3:13–17. John tries to prevent the baptism, and his objection makes sense: what is it? Then name everything that happens the instant Jesus comes up from the water. Who is present in this scene?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

John knows Jesus does not need a baptism of repentance; if anything their roles should be reversed. Jesus answers that it is fitting “to fulfil all righteousness”: he stands with the sinners he came to save. Coming up from the water: the heavens open, the Spirit of God descends as a dove, and the Father’s voice speaks. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are manifest together, the first open showing of the Trinity in the Gospel, and the pattern of every Christian baptism since: heaven opened, the Spirit given, sonship declared.

3. Live discovery. The Father’s sentence in 3:17 is woven from three Old Testament threads. Split into three groups: Psalm 2:6–7, Isaiah 42:1, and Genesis 22:1–2. Each group reads its passage and reports: who is being described, and what phrase do you hear echoed at the Jordan?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Psalm 2: the anointed Davidic King, “you are my son.” Isaiah 42: the Servant of the Lord in whom God delights, on whom God puts his Spirit, the figure whose mission ends in suffering. Genesis 22: “your son, your only son, whom you love,” the beloved son carried up a hill to be offered. In one sentence the Father names Jesus King, Servant, and beloved son to be offered. The whole Gospel is previewed in a single voice from heaven.

Build Then Press: Is Baptism Only a Symbol?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

Many Evangelical Christians read this chapter and conclude that baptism is an ordinance, a public symbol of a repentance and faith that have already happened in the heart. The case is serious. John’s baptism plainly symbolized repentance rather than causing it; crowds were baptized “confessing their sins”; and Jesus himself, who had nothing to wash away, was baptized, which seems to prove the act is testimony rather than transformation. Evangelicals also distinguish John’s preparatory baptism from Christian baptism after Pentecost, and they read the New Testament pattern as belief first, baptism after, as public testimony (Acts 2:41; 8:36–38); Paul can even say that Christ sent him not to baptize but to preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:17). On this reading, requiring baptism for salvation adds a work to grace. Let the group feel the coherence of this before pressing on it.

4. Now press from the text itself. Read Matthew 3:11 again carefully. What contrast does John himself draw between his baptism and the one the Messiah will give? Then look at what actually happens at Jesus’ baptism in 3:16–17. Is anything merely symbolized there, or does something happen?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

John himself makes the distinction the symbolic reading needs but cannot keep: “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he... will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” John’s baptism was indeed a symbol; that is exactly why it is not the last word. The Messiah’s baptism gives the Holy Spirit. Matthew 3:11 by itself does not yet say that this Spirit-baptism comes through water; it names the difference in power between John’s rite and the Messiah’s gift. Matthew himself closes

the link at the end of the Gospel, when the risen Christ commands water baptism in the threefold name (28:19), and the apostolic Church confirms it (1 Peter 3:21). And at the Jordan things do not merely get symbolized, they happen: heaven opens, the Spirit descends, the Father declares sonship. Christ is filling the water with what it will carry in his Church.

Hold this thread loosely tonight and let Matthew finish it: the Gospel's final command is to make disciples "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (28:19). The Trinity manifest over the Jordan is the same name spoken over every baptized Christian. St. Peter will say it without blinking: baptism now saves you (1 Peter 3:21), not as magic, but as God's own act through the sacrament his Son entered the water to establish.

Forty Days in the Wilderness

5. Read Matthew 4:1–11. Before looking anything up: what number in this passage should ring a bell after last week, and where does the Spirit lead Jesus? What story is being replayed?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Forty days in the wilderness after coming through the water, as Israel spent forty years in the wilderness after coming through the sea. Last week we found Hosea 11:1, Jesus called out of Egypt as the New Israel.

The pattern is now unmistakable: Egypt, water, wilderness. Jesus is reliving his people's story, and this time the Son does not fall.

6. **Live discovery.** Jesus answers all three temptations with the phrase "it is written." Split into three groups and find where each answer is written: Deuteronomy 8:1–3, Deuteronomy 6:16, and Deuteronomy 6:13. Read each in its context. What do all three answers have in common, and what Israel story sits behind each one?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

All three come from Deuteronomy 6–8, Moses' sermon interpreting Israel's wilderness failures: grumbling for bread (Exodus 16), putting God to the test at Massah (Exodus 17), and false worship (the golden calf, Exodus 32). Jesus takes his stand precisely where Israel fell, and answers with Israel's own book. Notice also how the tempter opens: "If you are the Son of God," a direct assault on the words the Father spoke at the Jordan. Temptation still works this way, questioning our identity as beloved sons and daughters. Jesus does not debate his identity; he stands on the word of God.

Light in Galilee

7. Read Matthew 4:12–22. **Live discovery:** have someone find Isaiah 9:1–2 and read on through verse 7. Why is it significant that the light dawns in "Galilee of the Gentiles"? And what strikes you about how the first disciples are called?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Isaiah 9 runs straight from light in Galilee to a child born for us who will reign on David's throne forever, the same royal promise the genealogy claimed. The ministry begins not in Jerusalem but in the borderlands where Jew and Gentile mix: the son-of-Abraham, all-nations side of Matthew 1:1 is already stirring. And the King's first act is to call ordinary working fishermen, immediately and by name, with a promise to remake them: fishers of men. He still builds his kingdom that way.

Send (12 minutes)

1. At your baptism the Father made you by adoption what he declared his Son to be by nature: a beloved son, a beloved daughter, in the Son. Where in your life right now does temptation begin with “if”, with questioning that identity?
2. Jesus answered every temptation with Scripture he clearly knew by heart. What is one verse you could carry into your most predictable temptation this week?

Live It This Week

- Find out the date of your baptism and write it somewhere you will see it. If you can, thank someone who was there.
- Memorize this week's verse and pray it once each day before your first meal.
- Read Matthew 5 before next session, and keep your running count of fulfillment citations.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, New Israel and beloved Son, you went down into our waters and came up tearing heaven open behind you. Renew in us the grace of our baptism. When the enemy whispers “if”, give us your answer: it is written. Lead us out of every wilderness in your company, and make us fishers of men. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 4:4 (RSV2CE): *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 2 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The New Exodus Begins · Matthew 3–4

Primary Text

• Matthew 3:1–12 · Matthew 3:11 · Matthew 3:13–17 · Matthew 4:1–11 · Matthew 4:12–22

Live Discovery Passages

• Isaiah 40:1–5 (end of exile) · Psalm 2:6–7, Isaiah 42:1, Genesis 22:1–2 (the Father's voice) · Deuteronomy 8:1–3; 6:16; 6:13 (the three answers) · Isaiah 9:1–7 (light in Galilee)

Background Passages

• 2 Kings 1:8 (Elijah's dress) · Malachi 4:5 (Elijah to come) · Exodus 16; 17:1–7; 32 (wilderness failures) · Matthew 28:19 and 1 Peter 3:21 (baptism, for the steelman) · Matthew 11:14 (John as Elijah, later)

Catechism

• CCC 535–537 · CCC 538–540 · CCC 1223–1225

Memory Verse

• Matthew 4:4

The Beatitudes and the Fulfilled Law

Matthew 5 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the payoff of the New Israel thread: Jesus goes up a mountain and delivers God's teaching, the New Moses giving the law of the New Covenant. They find that the Beatitudes are first a portrait of Christ himself and then the shape of true happiness, and that the antitheses ("you have heard that it was said... but I say to you") do not loosen the Law but drive it into the heart, on the authority of the Lawgiver himself.

Catholic Touchstone. The Beatitudes as the heart of Christian moral teaching (they open the Catechism's entire section on morality), the harmony of grace and lived righteousness, and the visible witness of good works: "that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father."

What You Need to Know

Watch the staging in 5:1–2. Jesus sees the crowds, goes up the mountain, sits down (the posture of a teacher with authority), and opens his mouth to teach. Every element echoes Sinai, where Moses ascended to receive God's law, with one staggering difference: Moses climbed to receive the law from God, while Jesus sits and gives it as his own. The wilderness pattern the group has been tracking (Egypt, water, desert) now reaches its destination: the mountain. This is the moment to let them feel the thread resolve without you announcing it.

The Beatitudes are not eight entrance requirements but a portrait, and the face in the portrait is Christ's. He is the poor in spirit, the meek, the mourner over sin, the persecuted one. The word *makarios* means blessed, happy in the deepest sense, and the Beatitudes answer the oldest human question, how to be happy, with a shape of life the world calls losing. Each one also carries a promise, and the first and last promise the same thing in the present tense: theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The Beatitudes describe kingdom citizens now.

Several Beatitudes quote or echo the Old Testament directly: the meek inheriting the earth is Psalm 37:11, comfort for mourners is Isaiah 61:2, and the pure in heart seeing God gathers up the longing of Psalm 24. Jesus is not inventing a new spirituality; he is announcing that the Scriptures' deepest promises are now being kept.

Verses 17–20 are the hinge of the chapter and one of the most important Christological claims in the Gospel: "I have come not to abolish but to fulfil." Fulfillment here means what it has meant since Session 1: Jesus brings the Law and the Prophets to their intended destination. Then comes the shock of verse 20: entrance into the kingdom requires a righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees, the most scrupulous law-keepers alive. The six antitheses that follow show what that exceeding righteousness looks like: not a lower bar but a deeper one, moving from the hand to the heart, from murder to anger, from adultery to the look, from managed divorce to faithfulness, from careful oaths to plain truthfulness, from measured retaliation to love of enemies. And note the formula: the prophets

said “thus says the Lord”; Jesus says “but I say to you.” Only the Lawgiver can speak about the Law this way.

Salt and light (5:13–16) sit between the Beatitudes and the antitheses on purpose: the community shaped by the Beatitudes is meant to be visible. Jesus commands that our good works be seen, not for our glory but so that others “give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Hold that verse in reserve; it does gentle, important work in tonight's steelman.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Exodus 19:3, 20; 20:1.** Moses ascends Sinai and God speaks the Law. Matthew 5:1–2 restages the scene with Jesus in the place of honor.
- **Psalms 37:11.** “The meek shall possess the land.” Jesus universalizes the promise: the meek inherit the earth.
- **Isaiah 61:1–3.** Good tidings to the poor and comfort to those who mourn; the Beatitudes announce this servant mission is underway.
- **Psalms 24:3–6.** Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? The clean of hands and pure of heart. The sixth Beatitude promises that seekers with pure hearts will see God himself.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount)

Augustine calls this sermon the perfect measure of the Christian life, and reads the Beatitudes as an ordered ascent: beginning in poverty of spirit, the soul climbs step by step until it reaches the vision of God and the peace of full sonship. The sermon is not advice for the few but the pattern for every disciple.

Voices of the Church: St. Gregory of Nyssa (Homilies on the Beatitudes)

Gregory pictures the Beatitudes as a mountain the Word himself leads us up, each blessing a higher step. The climb is possible only because the One who commands the ascent climbs with us and lifts us; the summit is nothing less than seeing God, for which the heart must be made pure.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

On salt and light, Chrysostom insists that Christ entrusted the flavor and brightness of the world to his disciples: the account of the world's unbelief will be demanded of a savorless Church. Our good works are meant to be seen, he says, precisely so that praise passes through us and lands on the Father.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1716–1719.** The Beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus' preaching, depict the countenance of Christ himself, and respond to the natural desire for happiness that God placed in the human heart.

- **CCC 577–578.** Jesus, far from abolishing the Law, fulfills it perfectly, revealing its ultimate meaning and redeeming the transgressions against it.
- **CCC 1965–1968.** The New Law, the grace of the Holy Spirit given through faith in Christ, finds its expression above all in the Sermon on the Mount; it does not add new external precepts but reforms the heart, the root of human acts.

Thread Watch

- **New Israel thread (resolve the first arc).** Egypt, water, wilderness, and now the mountain. Let the group discover the Sinai staging themselves in Build question 1; if they gasp, the thread has done its work. The New Moses pattern will echo again later in the Gospel.
- **Emmanuel thread (develop).** God-with-us now teaches face to face, as God once spoke from the cloud. Presence keeps drawing nearer.
- **Son of David thread (dormant).** Nothing new this week; keep it in your pocket.

Session Goals

1. Participants discover the Sinai staging of 5:1–2 for themselves and connect it to the New Israel pattern from Sessions 1 and 2.
2. Participants can explain the Beatitudes as a portrait of Christ and the true shape of happiness, with kingdom promises in the present tense.
3. Participants can articulate what “I have come not to abolish but to fulfil” means, and why “but I say to you” is a claim to divine authority.
4. Participants hear the strongest Protestant reading of 5:20 and can answer it honestly, holding grace and real transformation together.
5. Participants identify one antithesis that names their own battlefield and choose a concrete practice for the week.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: treat only two antitheses in depth instead of three in Build question 6 (saves about 6 minutes), then drop the Dig Deeper box on the structure of the Beatitudes (saves about 4 minutes). Do not cut the Sinai discovery or the steelman chain.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 3 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Beatitudes and the Fulfilled Law

Matthew 5 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Father, every human heart is built to seek happiness, and we have looked for it in so many places. Tonight your Son climbs the mountain to tell us where it actually lives. Give us ears to hear teaching that turns the world upside down, and hearts willing to be turned with it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. If you could ask one hundred people on the street what would finally make them happy, what answers would you hear most?
2. Who is the most genuinely happy person you know, and what is different about how they live?

Build (55 minutes)

The Mountain

1. Read Matthew 5:1–2 slowly, noticing every physical detail: where Jesus goes, what he does, his posture. **Live discovery:** now have someone read Exodus 19:3 and 20 and Exodus 20:1. We have been following Jesus through Egypt, through the water, and through the wilderness. Where has the road been leading, and what is different about this mountain?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The pattern completes itself: Egypt (2:15), water (3:16), wilderness (4:1), mountain. At Sinai, Moses climbed up to receive the Law from God. Here Jesus climbs the mountain, sits down as a teacher with authority, and gives God's teaching as his own. He is the New Moses, and more than Moses: the Lawgiver himself has come in person. Let the group say it before you do.

The Shape of Happiness

2. Read Matthew 5:3–12 aloud, one Beatitude per person around the circle. First impression: does this sound like a description of winning or losing by the world's scoreboard? Then ask: whose life, start to finish, does this list actually describe?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

By the world's scoreboard it reads like a list of the defeated: the poor, the mourning, the meek, the persecuted. But the word *makarios* means blessed, deeply happy, and each line carries a promise. Above all, the Beatitudes are a portrait before they are a program, and the face in the portrait is Christ's own: he is the poor one, the meek one, the mourner, the persecuted. To live the Beatitudes is to be conformed to him, and the first and last lines promise the kingdom in the present tense:

theirs IS the kingdom of heaven, now.

Dig Deeper: Old Promises Kept

Several Beatitudes are Scripture quoting Scripture: the meek inheriting the earth comes from Psalm 37:11, comfort for mourners from Isaiah 61:2, the pure in heart seeing God from the longing of Psalm 24. If time allows, send someone to Psalm 37:10–11 to hear the original. Jesus is not inventing a new spirituality; he is keeping Israel's oldest promises.

3. Read Matthew 5:13–16. What two images does Jesus use for his disciples, and what is each one for? Notice verse 16 carefully: what does Jesus command about our good works, and what is the goal?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Salt preserves and flavors; light exists to be seen. Both are useless kept to themselves. Jesus commands that our light shine and our good works be seen by others, not to win praise for ourselves, but “that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Visible, lived righteousness is part of the plan of evangelization. Keep this verse in hand; it matters in a few minutes.

Not to Abolish but to Fulfil

4. Read Matthew 5:17–20. What does Jesus say he came to do with the Law and the Prophets? And what does verse 20 demand of anyone who would enter the kingdom? Sit with how impossible that sounds; the scribes and Pharisees were the most rigorous law-keepers alive.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Not to abolish but to fulfil: to bring the Law and Prophets to their destination, as he has been fulfilling prophecy since Bethlehem. Verse 20 then raises the bar past the best law-keepers in Israel. The antitheses that follow show what he means: righteousness that goes deeper than the hand, all the way to the heart. The demand is real, and on our own it is impossible. What kind of help we need is exactly tonight's question.

Build Then Press: Is Verse 20 Meant to Drive Us to Despair?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

Classic Protestant teaching, especially in the Lutheran tradition, reads Matthew 5:20 and the antitheses as law in its crushing use: a standard pitched deliberately beyond human reach (“be perfect,” 5:48) so that we despair of our own righteousness and flee to Christ, whose perfect righteousness is credited to believers by faith alone. On this reading, the Sermon works first as a mirror that exposes our sin and drives us to Christ; believers, forgiven and set free, then bear real fruit and do genuine good works by the Spirit, yet never with the sinless perfection the standard demands, so their standing before God rests on Christ's imputed righteousness alone and never on their own obedience. This reading takes both human sinfulness and grace with total seriousness.

Let the group feel its force.

5. Now press from the Sermon itself. Look back at 5:16: whose works do people see, and are they real? Look at 5:19: who is called great in the kingdom? And glance ahead to how the Sermon will end in 7:24–27: what separates the wise builder from the foolish one? Does Jesus talk like a teacher whose commands cannot be lived?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The Sermon never treats itself as an impossible mirror. Jesus expects disciples to have visible good works that lead others to glorify God (5:16), calls those who do and teach these commandments great in the kingdom (5:19), and will end the Sermon dividing humanity by one thing only: hearing these words and doing them, or not (7:24–27). The commands are meant to be lived.

But the Protestant instinct guards a real truth, and we should say so plainly: on our own strength, verse 20 is impossible, and the Church has always agreed. The Catholic answer is not that we try harder; it is that grace does more than the mirror reading allows. The New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit poured into the heart, which does not merely cover our unrighteousness but actually transforms it, so that the exceeding righteousness of 5:20 becomes real in us, gift before it is task. The Beatitudes are the proof of concept: they are Christ's own portrait, and by grace they become ours. Not imputed only, but imparted; not our achievement, but truly our life.

From the Hand to the Heart

6. As a group, choose three of the six antitheses in 5:21–48 (anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, love of enemies) and read each aloud. For each, name it in one sentence: what did “you have heard” regulate, and where does “but I say to you” move the battle line? Then the quiet question: which of the six is your battlefield?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Every antithesis moves the line from the external act to its root in the heart: from murder to contempt, from adultery to the deliberate look, from managed divorce to covenant faithfulness, from careful oath-formulas to simple truthfulness, from proportional payback to enemy-love that mirrors the Father's perfection. Notice the formula itself: the prophets said “thus says the Lord”; Jesus says “but I say to you.” No prophet ever talked about God's Law this way. Only its Author can. Let the last question stay personal and unanswered aloud.

Send (12 minutes)

1. Which Beatitude, honestly, do you least want to be true, and what would change if you believed it names real happiness?
2. Where has your righteousness been living at the level of the hand while the heart stays unconverted? What would letting grace go one layer deeper look like this week?

Live It This Week

- Pray one Beatitude each morning, slowly, asking Christ to make his portrait true in you.
- Take your battlefield antithesis to confession or to honest prayer this week, asking not for willpower first but for grace.
- Do one good work this week that someone could see, and when it is noticed, deflect the glory upward.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, teacher on the mountain, your words are not advice but the law of your kingdom, and your Beatitudes are your own face. Pour your Spirit into our hearts so that what you command, you also accomplish in us. Make us salt that has not lost its taste and light that is not hidden, until people see and glorify the Father. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 5:16 (RSV2CE): *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 3 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The Beatitudes and the Fulfilled Law · Matthew 5

Primary Text

- Matthew 5:1–2 · Matthew 5:3–12 · Matthew 5:13–16 · Matthew 5:17–20 · Matthew 5:21–48 (three antitheses chosen by the group)

Live Discovery Passages

- Exodus 19:3, 20 and 20:1 (Sinai staging) · Psalm 37:10–11 (the meek, if time allows)

Background Passages

- Isaiah 61:1–3 (comfort for mourners) · Psalm 24:3–6 (the pure in heart) · Matthew 7:24–27 (the two builders, for the steelman) · Matthew 5:48 (be perfect)

Catechism

- CCC 1716–1719 · CCC 577–578 · CCC 1965–1968

Memory Verse

- Matthew 5:16

The Hidden Life of the Kingdom

Matthew 6–7 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that the second half of the Sermon moves from the heart's battles to the heart's habits: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting done for the Father who sees in secret; the Our Father as the pattern of all Christian prayer; trust in providence against anxiety; and the Sermon's sobering ending, where everything comes down to hearing these words and doing them.

Catholic Touchstone. The three pillars of the interior life that the Church sets before us every Lent, the Our Father as “the summary of the whole Gospel,” and an honest answer to the claim that repeated Catholic prayer is the “vain repetition” Jesus condemned.

What You Need to Know

Matthew 6 opens with a warning about practicing piety “before men in order to be seen by them,” which can sound like a contradiction of 5:16, where Jesus commanded that our light shine before men. The resolution is the aim: in chapter 5 the works are seen and the Father gets the glory; in chapter 6 the works are performed so that we get the glory. The audience of the heart is everything. Jesus then takes the three great acts of Jewish piety, almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, and does not abolish a single one. He says “when you give,” “when you pray,” “when you fast,” never “if.” He assumes his disciples will do all three and redirects each toward the Father who sees in secret. These are the three practices the Church hands us every Lent, and they are already named together in the Old Testament: Raphael's farewell speech in Tobit 12:8 commends prayer with fasting and almsgiving as the shape of a righteous life. For many participants this will be their first meeting with Tobit; receive it as a gift, not a debate point, though it is worth knowing that Tobit is one of the seven books found in Catholic Bibles and the Church has treasured it since the early centuries and definitively affirmed it as Scripture in her canon.

At the center of the chapter, and nearly at the mathematical center of the whole Sermon, Jesus gives his disciples a prayer. The Our Father contains seven petitions: the first three reach toward God (his name, his kingdom, his will), the last four carry our needs (bread, forgiveness, protection in trial, deliverance from evil). The Church has prayed it from the earliest days; the Didache already directs Christians to pray it three times daily, and it has held an honored place in the Eucharistic liturgy since the early centuries. One word in it is a genuine mystery: *epiousios*, translated “daily” bread, appears essentially nowhere else in all of Greek literature. Its most literal sense is something like “super-essential,” and St. Jerome rendered it “supersubstantial” in his Latin translation at this verse. The Church hears in it every level at once: real bread for today, God's word, and the Bread of Life. Hold the Eucharistic overtone gently; it is a resonance the tradition treasures, not a proof text.

The teaching on treasure, the sound eye, and the two masters (6:19–24) leads into the Sermon's most beloved passage on anxiety (6:25–34). The logic is a father's logic: look at the birds, consider the lilies; if

the Father feeds and clothes them, will he not much more care for you? The command is not to stop planning but to stop being mastered by worry, and the anchor is 6:33, seek first the kingdom.

Chapter 7 gathers the Sermon's closing counsels: the command against judging (7:1–5), which forbids condemning hearts rather than discerning behavior, since verse 5 still expects us to help remove the speck once our own log is out; the Father's readiness to give good things to those who ask (7:7–11); the Golden Rule as the Law and the Prophets in one sentence (7:12); and then the great warnings: the narrow gate, false prophets known by fruits, and the terrifying “I never knew you” of 7:21–23, where saying “Lord, Lord” and even working wonders does not substitute for doing the Father's will. The Sermon ends with the two builders: everyone who hears these words and does them builds on rock. Matthew closes by noting the crowds' astonishment: he taught as one who had authority. They heard exactly what the group discovered last week.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Tobit 12:8.** Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving named together as the shape of righteousness; Jesus takes up all three and interiorizes them.
- **Exodus 16:4, 16–21.** The manna given daily, enough for each day and no more; the school of daily bread behind the fourth petition.
- **1 Kings 10:4–7; 2 Chronicles 9:22.** Solomon's legendary splendor, surpassed, Jesus says, by a wildflower the Father dresses.
- **Psalms 136.** A single refrain repeated twenty-six times, held in reserve for tonight's steelman.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Cyprian of Carthage (On the Lord's Prayer)

Cyprian marvels that we dare to call God Father only because the Son has authorized the words: what could God refuse to those who pray in his Son's own prayer? He notes too that every pronoun is plural, our Father, our bread, our trespasses: the prayer of Christians is never a private possession but the voice of the whole Church.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Letter to Proba, on Prayer)

Augustine tells the widow Proba that whatever words we pray, if we are praying rightly, we are saying nothing that is not already contained in the Lord's Prayer. It is the measure of all Christian prayer: run through its petitions, he says, and you will find every legitimate desire of the heart gathered there.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

On almsgiving in secret, Chrysostom says the Father's seeing is the whole reward worth having: the applause of men is paid in full on the spot and is worth exactly what it costs, while what is done for the Father's eyes alone is stored where no moth or thief can reach it.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1434.** The interior penance of the Christian is expressed above all in three forms: fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, which express conversion toward God, oneself, and others.
- **CCC 2761, 2763. The Lord's Prayer is truly the summary of the whole Gospel (2761); St. Thomas Aquinas calls it the most perfect of prayers (2763).**
- **CCC 2837.** “Daily” (epiousios) is heard on several levels: in its temporal sense it teaches trust in the Father for this day's needs, in its qualitative sense it means the bread necessary for life, and taken literally (“super-essential”) it refers directly to the Bread of Life received in the Eucharist; the petition reaches every level of our dependence on the Father.
- **CCC 2608–2615.** In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches conversion of heart as the ground of prayer, filial trust in the Father, and bold, persevering petition.

Thread Watch

- **Emmanuel thread (develop).** A new note tonight: the Father “who sees in secret” and “knows what you need before you ask.” God-with-us is not only beside his people but attentive to their hidden life. Presence is becoming intimacy.
- **Fulfillment thread (develop).** The Golden Rule: “this is the law and the prophets” (7:12), the same pair Jesus came not to abolish but to fulfil (5:17). The Sermon closes its own frame.
- **Doing-the-word thread (plant, quietly).** The Sermon ends on hearing AND doing (7:21–27). Do not resolve it; this note returns fortissimo when we reach the judgment scene of Matthew 25 in Session 12.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain how 6:1 and 5:16 fit together: same works, different audience of the heart.
2. Participants discover the three pillars named together in Tobit and understand almsgiving, prayer, and fasting as assumed, not optional, in Jesus' teaching.
3. Participants can walk through the seven petitions of the Our Father and explain why the Church calls it the summary of the whole Gospel.
4. Participants hear the strongest Protestant objection to repetitive Catholic prayer and can answer it from Jesus' own words and practice.
5. Participants take one concrete step against anxiety this week anchored in 6:33, and feel the weight of the Sermon's ending: hearing and doing.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: drop the Dig Deeper box on epiousios (saves about 5 minutes), then compress Build question 7 on judging and the Golden Rule into a read-and-comment (saves about 6 minutes). Do not cut the Our Father walk-through or the steelman chain.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 4 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Hidden Life of the Kingdom

Matthew 6–7 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Our Father, you see in secret, and you know what we need before we ask. Quiet the noise we brought in with us tonight. Teach us to pray as your Son taught his friends to pray, and make our hidden life with you more real to us than every audience we perform for. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. What is something you do completely differently when you know someone is watching?
2. What did prayer look like in the home you grew up in, if it was there at all?

Build (55 minutes)

The Audience of the Heart

1. Read Matthew 6:1–6 and 6:16–18. Last week Jesus commanded us to let our light shine before men (5:16); now he warns against practicing piety before men. Is he contradicting himself? What single difference separates the two? And notice the small word Jesus uses before giving, praying, and fasting: is it “if” or “when”?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The difference is the aim of the heart: in 5:16 the works are seen and the Father gets the glory; in 6:1 the works are performed so that we get the glory. Same works, different audience. And Jesus says “when,” never “if”: he assumes his disciples give alms, pray, and fast. He abolishes none of the three pillars; he relocates all three into the secret room where only the Father is watching.

2. **Live discovery.** These three practices were not new. Have someone find Tobit 12:8 and read verses 6–9. Who is speaking, and what three things does he commend together? For those meeting Tobit for the first time: it is one of the seven books in Catholic Bibles that most Protestant Bibles omit, and the Church has treasured it since the early centuries and definitively affirmed it as Scripture in her canon.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The angel Raphael, unveiling himself to Tobit and Tobias, commends prayer with fasting and almsgiving as the treasure of a righteous life. Jesus takes up exactly these three and drives them into the secret of the heart. The Church hands us the same three every Lent. Receive the Tobit moment as a gift: the Catholic Bible is not padded, it is whole, and here one of its “extra” books turns out to be the quiet source standing behind the Sermon on the Mount.

Build Then Press: Is Repeated Prayer “Vain Repetition”?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

Read Matthew 6:7. Many Evangelical Christians, reading “do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words,” conclude that fixed, repeated prayers are exactly what Jesus forbids, and the Rosary looks like the leading example: the same words, dozens of times, counted on beads. On this reading, real prayer is spontaneous, personal conversation with God, and reciting formulas risks the very mechanical religion Jesus came to end. This objection is sincere, it takes Jesus' words seriously, and every Catholic who has ever rattled through a decade while thinking about lunch knows it is not attacking a strawman. Let it land.

3. Now press from the text and from Jesus' own practice. What does Jesus do in the very next verse after condemning empty phrases (6:9)? **Live discovery:** have one person find Matthew 26:44 and report how Jesus prays in Gethsemane; have another open Psalm 136 and describe its structure; have a third read Revelation 4:8 and report what the living creatures never stop doing.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The verse after the warning, Jesus gives his disciples a fixed prayer to say: “Pray then like this.” The Church has repeated it daily since the first century in direct obedience; the Didache, written within living memory of the apostles, already tells Christians to pray it three times a day. In Gethsemane Jesus prays a third time “saying the same words.” Psalm 136, known in Jewish tradition as the Great Hallel and sung at Passover, repeats one refrain twenty-six times. In heaven itself the living creatures never cease repeating the same praise day and night. Scripture cannot mean that repetition as such is vain.

The target of 6:7 is the pagan theory of prayer, *battalogo*, piling up words to wear down or manipulate a distant god, when in fact “your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” The problem is empty words, not familiar ones. A well-prayed Rosary is the opposite of empty: the lips hold a rhythm while the heart walks through the Gospel, mystery by mystery. The objection remains useful, though, as an examination of conscience: Jesus forbids exactly what our repetition becomes when the heart goes home early. The answer to bad repetition is not no repetition; it is attention.

The Prayer That Contains All Prayers

4. Read Matthew 6:9–13 slowly. Count the petitions and sort them: which reach toward God, and which carry our needs? What is the significance of the order, and of the very first word?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Seven petitions: three Godward (his name hallowed, his kingdom come, his will done) and four for us (bread, forgiveness, protection in the trial, deliverance from evil). The order is the whole spiritual life in miniature: the Father first, our needs inside his priorities, which is 6:33 in prayer form. And the first word is “our”: even prayed alone, this prayer is never private; we pray as

members of a family. St. Augustine said that whatever we pray rightly, we are praying nothing that is not already somewhere in these lines.

Dig Deeper: The Strangest Word in the Prayer

The Greek word translated “daily,” *epiousios*, appears essentially nowhere else in ancient Greek literature; it is as if the prayer needed a word no one had ever used. Its most literal sense is “super-essential,” and St. Jerome rendered it “supersubstantial” at this verse in his Latin translation. The Church hears every level at once: bread for today like the manna that could not be stockpiled, the word of God, and the Bread of Life. The tradition treasures the Eucharistic overtone; hold it as a resonance rather than a proof.

The Father's Logic Against Anxiety

5. Read Matthew 6:25–34. What two classes of witnesses does Jesus call to testify against anxiety, and what is his actual argument? Is he forbidding planning, and what is the positive command at the center of the passage?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The birds, who neither sow nor reap and are fed, and the lilies, dressed beyond Solomon's splendor. The argument is a father's how-much-more: if the Father does this for birds and grass, will he not much more care for you? Jesus is not forbidding work or prudence, he is forbidding being mastered by worry, living as “men of little faith” with pagan assumptions about an unattended universe. The positive command is the anchor: seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and the rest is the Father's business.

Hearing and Doing

6. Read Matthew 7:1–5 and 7:12. What exactly does “judge not” forbid, and what does verse 5 still expect us to do? How does the Golden Rule tie off the whole Sermon?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Verse 1 forbids condemnation, appointing ourselves judges of hearts with a measure we would not survive ourselves. It does not forbid moral discernment: verse 5 still expects the speck to be dealt with, by a person who has first done surgery on his own eye, and verse 6 immediately requires making judgments about persons and situations. The Golden Rule then compresses everything: “this is the law and the prophets,” the very pair Jesus came to fulfil. The Sermon closes its own frame.

7. Read Matthew 7:21–29. This may be the most sobering paragraph in the Gospel. Who is excluded in verses 21–23, and what were they able to say and even do? What single difference separates the two builders? And how do the crowds react to the whole Sermon?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Excluded are people who said “Lord, Lord” and even prophesied and worked wonders in his name, yet did not do the will of the Father: religious vocabulary and religious activity without obedience of heart. The two builders hear the same words; only one does them, and only his house stands. Hold this note; it will return with full force at the end of the Gospel. The crowds are astonished because he taught “as one who had authority,” which is precisely what we discovered on the mountain last week: not a commentator on the Law, but its Author.

Send (12 minutes)

1. Of the three pillars, almsgiving, prayer, fasting, which one is effectively missing from your life right now, and what is the smallest secret version of it you could begin this week?
2. What is the anxiety you feed most faithfully? What would seeking the kingdom first look like in that exact corner of your life?

Live It This Week

- Pray the Our Father once a day at walking speed, one petition at a time, and let it audit your other prayers.
- Choose one secret act: an alms nobody learns about, a fast nobody notices, a prayer with the door shut. Tell no one.
- When anxiety starts its speech this week, interrupt it out loud with this week's verse.

Closing Prayer

Father, you see in secret and reward in secret, and you know what we need before we ask. Hallowed be your name in us this week. Give us today's bread and no addiction to tomorrow's, forgive us as we let go of our debtors, and keep us in the trial. Make us doers of the word, builders on rock, and bring us back together in your Son. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 6:33 (RSV2CE): *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.”*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 4 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The Hidden Life of the Kingdom · Matthew 6–7

Primary Text

• Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18 · Matthew 6:7 · Matthew 6:9–13 · Matthew 6:25–34 · Matthew 7:1–5, 12 · Matthew 7:21–29

Live Discovery Passages

• Tobit 12:6–9 (the three pillars) · Matthew 26:44 (the same words in Gethsemane) · Psalm 136 (the repeated refrain) · Revelation 4:8 (unceasing praise)

Background Passages

• Matthew 5:16 with 6:1 (audience of the heart) · Exodus 16:4, 16–21 (daily manna) · 1 Kings 10:4–7 (Solomon's splendor) · Matthew 7:6 (discernment still required)

Catechism

• CCC 1434 · CCC 2761, 2763 · CCC 2837 · CCC 2608–2615

Memory Verse

• Matthew 6:33

The Messiah's Works

Matthew 8–9 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that Matthew follows the Messiah's words (chapters 5–7) with the Messiah's works: ten miracles arranged in three waves, showing the same authority the crowds heard on the mountain now touching lepers, commanding storms, expelling demons, forgiving sins, and raising the dead. They meet the centurion whose words the Church puts on our lips at every Mass, and they discover that Matthew ends the paralytic story with a sentence almost too Catholic to believe: God “had given such authority to men.”

Catholic Touchstone. Christ the physician of souls and bodies, the sacramental pattern of grace through touch and word and matter, and the roots of the sacrament of Reconciliation in the authority to forgive sins exercised on earth.

What You Need to Know

Chapters 8–9 gather ten miracles into three groups of three (with the ruler's daughter and the hemorrhaging woman interwoven as one story), separated by two interludes on the cost and call of discipleship. The arrangement is Matthew's own; he has collected works from different times into a portrait. After the Sermon's “authority” (7:29), each scene now demonstrates that authority over a different enemy: disease, distance, demon, storm, paralysis, death itself.

Notice how physical Jesus is. He touches the leper, whom the Law declared untouchable, and instead of uncleanness flowing into Jesus, cleansing flows into the leper. He takes Peter's mother-in-law by the hand. The hemorrhaging woman is healed through the fringe of his garment. Grace travels through matter and touch and spoken word. This is the sacramental pattern in seed: the Church's sacraments are not a departure from how Jesus works but a continuation of it.

The centurion (8:5–13) is a Gentile officer of the occupying army, and Jesus marvels at him, one of only two times the Gospels record Jesus marveling. His logic is a soldier's: authority does not need proximity, “only say the word.” Jesus responds with the first great announcement that many will come from east and west to recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the son-of-Abraham thread of 1:1 breaking into the open. The Church so treasures this man's sentence that she has placed it on our lips immediately before Holy Communion at every Mass: Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof.

Matthew 8:17 quotes Isaiah 53:4, “he took our infirmities and bore our diseases,” the Suffering Servant song. Matthew wants the healings read in the shadow of the Servant: this power will cost the Healer everything, a note that fully sounds only at the cross.

The stilling of the storm (8:23–27) ends with the question the whole Gospel is built to answer: “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?” The Old Testament has an answer ready, and tonight the group will find it in Psalm 107. Do not give it away.

The paralytic (9:1–8) provokes the first open conflict. Jesus forgives the man's sins before healing him, the scribes silently charge blasphemy, and their unspoken premise is correct: only God can forgive sins. Jesus then heals the body precisely as visible proof "that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins." On earth: not only at the throne of heaven but here, in the middle of human life. And Matthew's closing line is remarkable: the crowds glorified God "who had given such authority to men," plural. Writing decades later for a Church that knew the ministry of forgiveness among men, Matthew let that plural stand, and readers ancient and modern have heard the Church's own experience in it. Tonight's steelman lives here.

The call of Matthew the tax collector (9:9–13) gives the session its heart: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6), and "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." The evangelist is telling his own story in three verses. Finally, watch 9:27: two blind men cry out "Have mercy on us, Son of David." This is the first time in the Gospel anyone addresses Jesus by the genealogy's royal title, and it is the blind who see it. The Son of David thread planted in Session 1 begins to move.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Isaiah 53:4.** The Servant who takes our infirmities; Matthew reads the healings as Servant-work that will cost the cross.
- **Psalms 107:23–30.** Who stills the storm so that the waves of the sea are hushed? The psalm's answer is the answer to the disciples' question in the boat.
- **Hosea 6:6.** "I desire mercy and not sacrifice": Jesus sends the Pharisees, and us, to go and learn this line, and he will quote it again in chapter 12.
- **Leviticus 13–14.** Background to the leper: the untouchability of leprosy and the priestly verification Jesus explicitly honors, "show yourself to the priest."

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Sermons on the Gospels)

Augustine loves the centurion's paradox: by declaring himself unworthy to receive Christ under his roof, he showed himself worthy to receive Christ into his heart. Humility is the doorway the Lord delights to enter, which is why the Church gives us this soldier's words at the threshold of Communion.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

On the paralytic, Chrysostom observes that Jesus answered the scribes' hidden thoughts, itself a divine act, and then gave the visible healing as proof of the invisible one. The easier thing to say was made the witness of the harder: the healed body walked out as evidence of the absolved soul.

Voices of the Church: St. Peter Chrysologus (Sermons)

Preaching on the woman who touched the fringe of Christ's garment, Peter Chrysologus marvels that she reached for the hem and touched heaven: faith made a border of cloth a channel of divine

power. God does not disdain to work through the smallest and humblest things his Son has touched.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1503–1505.** Christ the physician: his compassion toward the sick and his many healings are a resplendent sign that God has visited his people; he makes our miseries his own, and Matthew 8:17 with Isaiah 53:4 points ahead to the Passion.
- **CCC 1441–1442.** Only God forgives sins; because Jesus is the Son of God he says “the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” Further, by virtue of his divine authority he willed that his Church continue this ministry of forgiveness and entrusted its exercise to the apostolic ministry.
- **CCC 1386.** Before receiving the Eucharist the faithful make the centurion’s words their own: Lord, I am not worthy. The Church canonized this Gentile soldier’s sentence into her deepest moment of prayer.

Thread Watch

- **Son of David thread (first movement).** At 9:27 the blind men become the first people in the Gospel to address Jesus by the royal title of 1:1, and they pair it with a plea for mercy. Note who can see what the seeing cannot; the pattern will repeat.
- **Emmanuel thread (develop).** God-with-us is now God-in-reach: touchable, interruptible, sharing tables with tax collectors. Presence has become contact.
- **Fulfillment thread (develop).** Two more citations (8:17; the Hosea line commanded twice). Ask for the running count.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain how chapters 8–9 demonstrate in works the authority the Sermon claimed in words.
2. Participants recognize the sacramental pattern of grace through touch, word, and matter across the miracles.
3. Participants connect the centurion’s sentence to the Mass and his faith to the son-of-Abraham thread.
4. Participants discover Psalm 107 as the answer to the disciples’ question in the storm.
5. Participants hear the strongest Protestant objection to priestly absolution and can answer it from Matthew 9 itself, with honest hedges.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: drop the Dig Deeper box on the leper and the priest (saves about 4 minutes), then compress Build question 6 on Matthew’s call into a read-and-comment (saves about 5 minutes). Do not cut the Psalm 107 discovery or the steelman chain.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 5 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Messiah's Works

Matthew 8–9 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, physician of souls and bodies, the crowds pressed in on you from every side and you turned no one away. We press in tonight with our own diseases, seen and unseen. Say the word, and your servants shall be healed. Give us the centurion's faith, the leper's boldness, and Matthew's readiness to get up and follow. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Describe a moment when someone in authority used their power to help you when they did not have to. What did it feel like?
2. What is harder for you: asking for help, or admitting you need it in the first place?

Build (55 minutes)

The Touch That Cleanses

1. Read Matthew 8:1–4. Under the Law, what happened to anyone who touched a leper, and what happens here instead? Why might Jesus touch him when a word alone would clearly do? And what does Jesus tell the man to do afterward?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The Law made the leper untouchable; contact transmitted uncleanness. Here the current reverses: holiness flows out and cleanses. Jesus touches a man who may not have felt a human hand in years, because the healing is aimed at the whole person. Then he sends him to the priest as the Law of Moses required for verification and restoration to the community. Notice the pattern that will fill this whole session: grace working through touch, word, and visible things, and the healed person sent into a public, communal act. Jesus works sacramentally before there are sacraments.

Dig Deeper: Show Yourself to the Priest

Jesus, who has just claimed authority above Moses on the mountain, still honors the public, priestly verification of the Law (Leviticus 14). This healing is not a purely private transaction; the Law completes it in the community. Hold the pattern; it returns when the Church hears confessions and anoints the sick.

2. Read Matthew 8:5–13. What is the centurion's argument for why Jesus does not need to come to his house? What does Jesus marvel at, and what does he announce about east and west? **For Catholics:** where have you heard this man's sentence before?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The centurion reasons from authority: he commands and things happen at a distance, so the One with real authority need only say the word. Jesus marvels at faith he has not found in Israel, coming from a Gentile officer, and announces that many will come from east and west to the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: the son-of-Abraham, all-nations promise of 1:1 breaking into the open. And the Church has placed his sentence on our lips at every Mass, right before Communion: Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof. Every Catholic quotes this Gentile soldier just before receiving the Lord.

The Question in the Boat

3. Read Matthew 8:23–27. The disciples' closing question is the hinge of the scene: “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?” **Live discovery:** the Old Testament already answered it. Have someone find Psalm 107:23–30 and read it aloud. Who, in the psalm, stills storms so that the waves are hushed? So what is Matthew showing us asleep in the boat?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

In Psalm 107 it is the LORD himself who commands the storm and stills the sea while sailors cry to him in trouble. No prophet ever calmed a storm by his own word; this is the Creator's signature. Matthew is showing the disciples' question already answered: the One asleep in the boat is the Lord of Psalm 107 in person. Do not resolve the sealed guess yet, but feel how the evidence is stacking.

Build Then Press: Can Any Man Forgive Sins?

4. Read Matthew 9:1–8 carefully before the steelman. What does Jesus say first to the paralytic, what do the scribes think, and what visible thing does Jesus do as proof of the invisible thing?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

The scribes' premise is one every Protestant shares, and it is correct: only God can forgive sins. On the most common Protestant reading, this scene proves Jesus' divinity, full stop. The authority to forgive belongs to the Son of man because the Son of man is God; nothing here transfers it to anyone else. From this angle the Catholic confessional gets the scribes' charge exactly backwards: when a priest says “I absolve you,” he claims for a man what this very passage reserves to God. A Christian should confess directly to God, who needs no human middleman. This objection is serious, biblical, and motivated by honoring God's unique prerogative. Let it stand at full height.

Leader note: Protestant practice is not uniform here. Lutheran and some Anglican traditions retain confession and a declarative absolution, in which a called minister announces God's forgiveness. The objection above is the evangelical and Reformed form, which is the strongest one against the Catholic confessional; if someone raises the Lutheran practice, note that it concedes part of the Catholic point, that God forgives through the word of a man he sends.

5. Now press on Matthew's own conclusion. Read 9:8 slowly, exactly as written. When the crowds glorify God, what precisely do they glorify him for giving, and to whom? Why might Matthew, writing

years later for the Church, choose that plural?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Matthew writes that the crowds glorified God “who had given such authority to men,” plural. If the point were only that Jesus is God, the sentence is strange; you do not praise God for giving authority “to men” because one man is God. Matthew was writing for a Church that already knew the risen Lord had breathed on the apostles and said “if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven” (John 20:22-23). On a natural Catholic reading, one many commentators share, his readers would hear their own experience inside the scene: the authority exercised on earth by the Son of man now continues on earth among men.

Be honest about the hedge: Matthew 9:8 by itself does not prove the sacrament of Reconciliation; it is a seed, not the tree. But this reading has to explain the plural away, and it has to explain why this Gospel will twice hand binding-and-loosing authority to men (hold that thread; it arrives in Sessions 8 and 9). The Catholic claim is modest and strong: the priest forgives no sin by his own power; it is Christ who absolves through him, which is exactly authority given to men rather than possessed by them. The scribes' premise stands untouched: only God forgives sins. The question is whether God may forgive through the men his Son sends, and Matthew's Gospel keeps answering yes.

Mercy, Not Sacrifice

6. Read Matthew 9:9–13. What is scandalous about the call of Matthew and the dinner that follows?

Live discovery: Jesus assigns homework: “go and learn what this means.” Do the homework; have someone find Hosea 6:6 and read verses 4–6. What is God saying through Hosea, and what is Jesus saying by quoting it at this table?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Tax collectors were collaborators with Rome, presumed thieves, religiously unclean company. Jesus calls one to the inner circle and then eats at his house with a roomful of his friends. Hosea's Israel offered plenty of sacrifice while its covenant love evaporated like morning dew; God wants mercy, steadfast love, more than religious performance. At Matthew's table Jesus tells the scrupulous that the sick need the physician and that he came to call sinners. Remember who is writing this Gospel down: the evangelist is telling his own conversion in three verses.

The Blind Who See

7. Read Matthew 9:27–31. Listen to the exact title the two blind men use. Where has this Gospel taught us that title, and what is striking about who uses it first?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

“Have mercy on us, Son of David”: the royal title of the genealogy (1:1), and this is the first time in the Gospel anyone addresses Jesus with it. The first to see the King are men who cannot see at all. Keep a quiet list from tonight forward of who calls Jesus “Son of David” and what they ask him for;

the pattern is building toward something at the gates of Jerusalem.

Send (12 minutes)

1. The centurion's words are on your lips at every Mass. What would it change to mean them completely this Sunday?
2. Jesus said the sick need a physician, and his authority to forgive still works on earth. How long has it been since you let him say "your sins are forgiven" to you personally, out loud, in the sacrament?

Live It This Week

- At Mass this week, pray the centurion's line slowly and deliberately, remembering the man who first said it.
- Make a plan for confession this month: pick the day and put it where you will see it. Bring the paralytic's four friends if you need courage.
- Show one act of mercy-not-sacrifice this week: choose a person over a performance.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us. You touched the untouchable, praised the faith of an outsider, stilled the sea with a word, and proved on earth your authority to forgive. Say the word we need most tonight. Send us out like Matthew, quick to rise, glad to follow, and eager to set a bigger table. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 9:13 (RSV2CE): *"Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 5 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The Messiah's Works · Matthew 8–9

Primary Text

• Matthew 8:1–4 · Matthew 8:5–13 · Matthew 8:17 · Matthew 8:23–27 · Matthew 9:1–8 · Matthew 9:9–13 · Matthew 9:27–31

Live Discovery Passages

• Psalm 107:23–30 (who stills the storm) · Hosea 6:4–6 (mercy, not sacrifice)

Background Passages

• Leviticus 13–14 (leprosy and priestly verification) · Isaiah 53:4 (quoted at 8:17) · John 20:22–23 (for the steelman) · Matthew 16:19; 18:18 (binding and loosing, held for later sessions)

Catechism

• CCC 1503–1505 · CCC 1441–1442 · CCC 1386

Memory Verse

• Matthew 9:13

Sent Out and Pushed Back

Matthew 10–12 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that the King who taught and healed now shares his mission: he names twelve apostles, clothes them with his own authority, and binds himself to them so tightly that receiving them is receiving him. They watch opposition gather through chapters 11–12, hear Jesus' astonishing self-revelation ("no one knows the Father except the Son"), and learn what he actually meant in the scene Protestants most often quote against Catholic love for Mary.

Catholic Touchstone. The apostolic office: Christ sends men who stand in his person, the seed of everything the Church means by apostolic succession, and Simon is listed "first." Also an honest, textual answer on "who is my mother?"

What You Need to Know

Chapter 10 is the second of Matthew's five great discourses. Jesus summons twelve disciples, the number is not accidental, Israel had twelve tribes and the New Israel is being given twelve foundations, and gives them his own authority over unclean spirits and disease. Matthew calls them *apostoloi*, "sent ones," the only time he uses the word. Many scholars hear behind it the Jewish institution of the shaliach, the commissioned agent, whose principle is preserved in later rabbinic writings: a man's shaliach is as the man himself, so that dealing with the agent is dealing with the sender. Whether or not the formal institution was already fixed in Jesus' day, he voices the same principle at the discourse's climax: "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me" (10:40). The apostle is not a messenger boy; he is Christ's commissioned representative, bearing an authority not his own. Everything the Church means by the apostolic office grows from this seed.

One detail in the list of the Twelve (10:2–4) deserves a quiet mental note: Matthew writes "first, Simon, who is called Peter." No one else in the list gets a number. "First" cannot mean merely first-called, since Andrew was called at the same moment. Say nothing to the group tonight beyond letting them notice it; the word is a planted seed that flowers in two weeks.

The discourse is bracingly honest about cost: sheep among wolves, floggings, betrayal within families, hatred "for my name's sake," not peace but a sword. The sword saying (10:34) does not mean Christ desires violence; it means the Prince of Peace is so decisive a figure that households divide over him, as Micah 7:6 (which Jesus quotes) foresaw. Loyalty to Jesus outranks even the closest human bonds, and the discourse ends with the whole Gospel in miniature: whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Chapter 11 opens with John the Baptist's question from prison: "Are you he who is to come?" Jesus answers by pointing to his works in the language of Isaiah 35 and 61, then turns to honor John as more than a prophet, the promised messenger of Malachi 3:1, and, "if you are willing to accept it," Elijah who is to come (11:14), confirming the identification the group glimpsed in Session 2. Then the woes on unrepentant cities, and then the thunderbolt of 11:25–27: the Son thanks the Father, Lord of heaven and

earth, and declares that no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. This mutual, exclusive knowing between Father and Son is the highest Christology in the Synoptic Gospels; scholars sometimes call it a Johannine thunderbolt fallen into Matthew. It flows immediately into the tenderest invitation in Scripture: come to me, all who labor, and I will give you rest, for my yoke is easy.

Chapter 12 gathers the storm. Two Sabbath controversies, in which Jesus claims to be greater than the temple and Lord of the Sabbath, two claims only God can survive making. Matthew then quotes Isaiah 42:1–4 at length, his longest Old Testament citation: the chosen Servant who will not break a bruised reed, proclaiming justice to the Gentiles. The Beelzebul accusation follows, with Jesus' answer about the divided kingdom and the strong man, and the solemn warning about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Handle that verse pastorally; see the Dig Deeper box. The scribes then demand a sign, and Jesus promises only “the sign of the prophet Jonah”: as Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of man be in the heart of the earth. Plant it and leave it; the group should feel it is a promissory note not yet cashed.

The chapter ends with the scene the steelman engages: Jesus' mother and brethren stand outside asking for him, and he answers, “Who is my mother?... whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.” Read badly, it sounds like a demotion of Mary. Read carefully, it defines the family she belongs to first of all.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Isaiah 35:5–6 and 61:1.** The works Jesus lists for John's messengers: eyes opened, the lame walking, the poor hearing good news. The answer to “are you he” is Isaiah happening.
- **Malachi 3:1.** The messenger sent before the Lord's face, applied by Jesus to John at 11:10.
- **Micah 7:6.** Households divided, quoted at 10:35–36: the Messiah forces a decision that runs through families.
- **Isaiah 42:1–4.** The gentle Servant, Matthew's longest citation (12:18–21): justice for the nations without breaking the bruised reed.
- **Jonah 1:17.** Three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, the only sign this generation will be given.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Clement of Rome (Letter to the Corinthians)

Writing near the end of the first century, within living memory of the apostles, Clement traces the chain plainly: Christ was sent from God, the apostles from Christ, and the apostles in turn appointed their first converts, tested by the Spirit, to succeed them. The pattern of sent men sending men is as old as the Gospel itself.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (On Holy Virginity)

Augustine answers tonight's hard scene directly: Mary is more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ than in conceiving his flesh. Her nearness as mother would have profited her nothing had

she not borne Christ more happily in her heart than in her flesh. Far from demoting Mary, the Lord's words crown her twice.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

On the easy yoke, Chrysostom says the Lord does not remove the yoke but changes its nature: what makes labor light is love. To those frightened by the Gospel's demands he answers that Christ himself is yoked alongside, and what is carried with him ceases to crush.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 858–860.** Jesus is the Father's emissary; the apostles are his emissaries, so that “he who receives you receives me.” In them Christ continues his own mission, and their office is permanent, provided for through successors.
- **CCC 552.** Simon Peter holds the first place in the college of the Twelve; Jesus entrusted a unique mission to him. Tonight only the word “first” is on the table; the mission arrives in two sessions.
- **CCC 1864.** Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: God's mercy has no limits, but whoever deliberately refuses to accept it by repenting rejects the forgiveness of sins; such hardness of heart, final impenitence, is the only sin that “cannot be forgiven” because it refuses forgiveness itself.

Thread Watch

- **Peter thread (plant, silently).** “First, Simon, who is called Peter.” Underline nothing; if a participant notices, smile and say “hold that thought for two weeks.”
- **Emmanuel thread (develop, loudly).** “Something greater than the temple is here” (12:6). The temple was where God's presence dwelt on earth. Let the group say aloud what must be standing in that grainfield.
- **Sign of Jonah (plant).** Three days and nights in the heart of the earth: a promissory note. It is cashed at the end of the study.
- **Son of David thread (develop).** After the healing of 12:22, the crowds ask, “Can this be the Son of David?” The title is spreading from the blind to the crowds. Keep the running list.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain the shaliach principle and why “he who receives you receives me” grounds the apostolic office.
2. Participants notice “first, Simon” and file it without resolution.
3. Participants can state the claims of 11:27 and 12:6–8 and why they are either true or blasphemous, with no third option.
4. Participants hear the strongest Protestant use of “who is my mother” and can answer it from the text and St. Augustine.

5. Participants receive 11:28–30 personally and identify the burden they will bring under the easy yoke this week.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: drop the Dig Deeper box on blasphemy against the Spirit and cover its content in one spoken sentence (saves about 5 minutes), then compress Build question 2 on the cost sayings into a read-and-comment (saves about 5 minutes). Do not cut the shaliach discovery or the steelman chain.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 6 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Sent Out and Pushed Back

Matthew 10–12 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you did not keep your mission to yourself: you called twelve unlikely men, breathed your authority into their sending, and promised that whoever received them received you. Thank you for the unbroken chain of sent ones that carried the Gospel from your lips to our town. Give us tonight the honesty of John's question and the rest of your easy yoke. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Have you ever had to represent someone else, sign for them, speak for them, act in their name? What did that responsibility feel like?
2. What is the most worn out you have ever been, body or soul, and what actually gave you rest?

Build (55 minutes)

Twelve Sent Men

1. Read Matthew 10:1–5a. What does Jesus give the twelve before he gives them instructions? Why twelve, of all numbers, for the New Israel we have watched him embody? And read the list slowly: does anything about how Simon is introduced catch your eye?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He gives them his own authority over unclean spirits and disease before a word of instructions: the mission runs on his power, not their talent. Twelve matches the twelve tribes; the New Israel is being given twelve foundations. And Matthew writes “first, Simon, who is called Peter”: no one else in the list receives a number, and “first” cannot just mean first-called, since his brother Andrew was called in the same moment. If the group notices, congratulate them and say only: hold that thought for two weeks.

2. Skim the hard middle of the discourse: read 10:16–22 and 10:34–39. What does Jesus promise his messengers, and what does he emphatically not promise? What does the “sword” of verse 34 cut through, according to verses 35–36?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He promises wolves, councils, floggings, betrayal, and hatred for his name's sake, together with the Spirit's help in the hour of trial; he does not promise safety or ease. The sword is not a call to violence: quoting Micah 7:6, Jesus says decision about him will divide even households. He is too decisive a figure for neutrality, and loyalty to him outranks every other bond. Then the paradox that seals the discourse: whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

3. Live discovery. Read Matthew 10:40. In Jewish practice, preserved in later rabbinic law, a commissioned agent, a shaliach, stood in the sender's place: dealing with the agent was dealing with the man. Given that background, spell out what Jesus is claiming in this verse, link by link. Where does the chain start and end? What does that make an apostle?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Receives you, receives me; receives me, receives him who sent me. The chain runs from the Father through Christ into the twelve: the apostle carries Christ's own presence and authority to whoever receives him. An apostle is not a fan or a messenger boy but a commissioned representative, and everything the Church means by the apostolic office and its succession grows from this verse. St. Clement of Rome, writing in the first century, already describes the chain continuing: God sent Christ, Christ sent the apostles, the apostles appointed successors.

Are You He Who Is to Come?

4. Read Matthew 11:2–6. John, who baptized Jesus, now asks from prison whether Jesus is the one. **Live discovery:** Jesus answers in borrowed words; have someone find Isaiah 35:5–6 and read verses 3–6. Why answer a yes-or-no question with a list of works? And what do you make of the beatitude Jesus adds in verse 6?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Jesus answers by pointing at Isaiah happening: eyes opened, legs restored, lepers cleansed, the dead raised, the poor hearing good news. It is a stronger answer than “yes,” because it invites John to recognize the promised age arriving in the evidence. The added beatitude, blessed is he who takes no offense at me, acknowledges that Jesus is not the kind of Messiah anyone scripted, John included, and gently blesses everyone whose expectations he breaks. Jesus then honors John as Malachi's messenger and, if we are willing to accept it, the Elijah who was to come, confirming the hint we caught in his clothing back in Session 2.

The Thunderbolt and the Yoke

5. Read Matthew 11:25–30 aloud, slowly; it may be the most staggering paragraph in the Gospel so far. In verse 27, what does Jesus claim about the knowledge between the Father and the Son? Who can know the Father at all, and on whose decision? Then feel the turn at verse 28: what does this exclusive Son immediately do with his privilege?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

All things have been delivered to him; no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. That is a claim to a mutual, exclusive, divine knowing: not a prophet's acquaintance with God but the Son's own interiority with the Father. And the very next breath, the One holding that privilege throws the door open: come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden. The most exclusive claim in the Synoptic Gospels becomes the widest invitation in Scripture. His yoke is easy because, as St. John Chrysostom says, he is yoked alongside; what is carried with him ceases to crush.

6. Read Matthew 12:1–8. In the grainfield argument, Jesus makes two claims that no mere teacher could survive making. Find them both. Given what the temple was for Israel, what is he actually saying in verse 6, and what does it do to our Emmanuel thread?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

“Something greater than the temple is here” (12:6) and “the Son of man is lord of the Sabbath” (12:8). The temple was the one place on earth where God’s presence dwelt among his people; the Sabbath was God’s own institution from creation. To be greater than the temple is to be, in person, what the temple only housed: the presence of God with us. The Emmanuel thread just stepped into the open. Either these claims are true or they are blasphemy, which is exactly the alternative his enemies see; what no one can honestly call them is modest.

Dig Deeper: The Sin That Cannot Be Forgiven

Matthew 12:31–32 frightens tender consciences, so say this plainly: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not a word that slips out, and no one who fears having committed it has committed it. It names the final, deliberate refusal of the Spirit’s work, calling grace evil and rejecting forgiveness itself. God’s mercy has no limit; a heart can close itself to mercy, and that closure, persisted in to the end, is the one sin that cannot be forgiven because it will not be (CCC 1864). The worried should hear: your worry is the Spirit still at work in you.

Build Then Press: “Who Is My Mother?”

7. Read Matthew 12:46–50 before the steelman, exactly as written.

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

Here, many Protestants argue, Jesus himself puts Marian devotion in its place. His mother stands outside asking for him, and rather than privileging her he gestures at his disciples: whoever does the will of my Father is my brother and sister and mother. Physical motherhood, on this reading, gives Mary no special standing in the kingdom; discipleship is the only family that counts, and it is open equally to all. Catholics who exalt Mary above other believers are honoring exactly the tie Jesus here declines to honor. This reading has real force: Jesus truly is relativizing biological kinship, and he really does define his family by obedience to the Father. Let it land before answering.

8. Now press with one question the objection forgets to ask: by Jesus’ own criterion, doing the will of the Father, where does Mary rank? Consider everything Scripture shows of her, from her consent to God’s plan through her standing at the cross. Does Jesus’ definition of family exclude his mother, or describe her?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Jesus is genuinely relativizing biological kinship: bloodline alone saves no one, and his family is

defined by doing the Father's will. But run Mary through his own test. Her whole recorded life is consent to the will of God, from her yes at the Annunciation to her place at the foot of the cross when the twelve had scattered. By the very criterion of 12:50, she is not demoted; she is the family's charter member. St. Augustine put it exactly: Mary is more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ than in conceiving his flesh, and her motherhood would have profited her nothing had she not borne him more happily in her heart than in her flesh.

So the Catholic conclusion is the opposite of a concession: the Church honors Mary first of all as the perfect disciple, blessed twice over, in body and in faith. Jesus' words do not lower Mary to the level of ordinary discipleship; they reveal that her true greatness was always her discipleship, which her divine motherhood crowned rather than replaced.

Send (12 minutes)

1. Christ still comes to people through his sent ones, and through us. Who receives Christ when they receive you: your family, your coworkers, your parish? What are they receiving lately?
2. Name the burden you have been carrying alone. What would it mean, concretely, to bring it under the easy yoke this week rather than out from under every yoke?

Live It This Week

- Pray Matthew 11:28–30 each evening this week, naming your actual burden out loud before the Lord.
- Do one act this week as Christ's representative on purpose: a visit, an apology carried, a mercy delivered in his name.
- Read Matthew 13 before next session: seven short parables. Note which one you understand least.

Closing Prayer

Father, Lord of heaven and earth, you have hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to little ones. Make us little enough to see. Lord Jesus, greater than the temple, gentle and lowly in heart, take our burdens under your yoke and teach us your rest. Send us as you were sent, and let everyone who receives us receive something of you. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 11:28 (RSV2CE): *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 6 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

Sent Out and Pushed Back · Matthew 10–12

Primary Text

• Matthew 10:1–5a · Matthew 10:16–22 · Matthew 10:34–39 · Matthew 10:40 · Matthew 11:2–6 · Matthew 11:25–30 · Matthew 12:1–8 · Matthew 12:31–32 · Matthew 12:46–50

Live Discovery Passages

• Isaiah 35:3–6 (the works of the coming age)

Background Passages

• Micah 7:6 (households divided, quoted at 10:35–36) · Malachi 3:1 (the messenger, quoted at 11:10) · Matthew 11:14 with 2 Kings 1:8 (Elijah) · Isaiah 42:1–4 (quoted at 12:18–21) · Jonah 1:17 (the sign of Jonah, 12:39–40) · Matthew 12:22–23 (“Can this be the Son of David?”)

Catechism

• CCC 858–860 · CCC 552 · CCC 1864

Memory Verse

• Matthew 11:28

The Kingdom in Parables

Matthew 13 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the third great discourse: seven parables that answer the question chapters 11–12 raised. If the King has come, why is his kingdom resistible, small, hidden, and mixed? Because in its present season the kingdom grows like seed, hides like leaven, and gathers weeds with wheat until a harvest that belongs to God alone. They also discover why Jesus teaches in parables at all, and what the kingdom is worth to the one who finds it.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church as the kingdom's present, mixed form: a field of wheat and weeds, a net of every kind of fish, holy in her Lord while clasping sinners to her bosom. Tonight's steelman meets the "invisible church of the truly saved" head on, from Jesus' own parables.

What You Need to Know

Matthew 13 is the hinge of the Gospel. After the mounting rejection of chapters 11–12, Jesus changes his teaching method: "that same day" he sits in a boat and speaks to the crowds only in parables. When the disciples ask why, his answer (13:10–17, quoting Isaiah 6:9–10) is sobering: parables both reveal and conceal. To the open they give the secrets of the kingdom in unforgettable images; to the closed they are riddles that pass through without landing. A parable is a mirror and a judgment at once: what you hear in it reveals what your heart has become. Jesus ends the Isaiah quotation with a beatitude for the disciples' eyes and ears, and Matthew adds his own fulfillment citation at 13:35, from Psalm 78:2: I will open my mouth in parables.

The sower comes first and is the key to all the rest; Jesus says as much in Mark's parallel. The seed is the word of the kingdom, and the variable is never the seed but the soil: the hard path, the shallow rock, the thorny heart choked by cares and riches, and the good soil that hears, understands, and bears fruit at thirty, sixty, a hundredfold. It quietly answers chapter 11–12's scandal: the word really was preached and really was rejected, and the fault lay in soils, not in the Sower.

The weeds among the wheat (13:24–30, interpreted at 13:36–43) is tonight's doctrinal center. An enemy sows weeds, likely darnel, which mimics wheat until the heads form, through a field the master planted. The servants' instinct is ours: pull them up now. The master forbids it: uprooting now would tear out wheat with the weeds, and sorting belongs to the harvesters at the close of the age. Jesus' interpretation makes the field the world and the kingdom in its present form a mixed reality, purified only at the end. The dragnet (13:47–50) says the same in one image: the net gathers fish of every kind, and the sorting happens on the shore, at the end, by angels. Twice in one chapter Jesus describes the kingdom's present season as mixed, a mixture the King permits until the harvest, and reserves the separating to God.

The mustard seed and the leaven form a pair about scale and visibility: the smallest of seeds becomes a tree where birds nest, an image drawn from Ezekiel's great cedar sheltering the birds of every wing, and a pinch of leaven silently works through three measures of flour, enough dough to feed a village. Small

beginnings, unstoppable growth, hidden operation. The treasure and the pearl form a second pair about worth: the finder of each sells everything he has, and the treasure-finder does it “in his joy.” The kingdom does not extract a sacrifice; it reveals a bargain.

The chapter closes with the scribe “trained for the kingdom of heaven,” who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old (13:52), as close to a self-portrait as Matthew ever paints, and a fair description of what this study does every week, reading the new Gospel with the old Scriptures open beside it. Then Nazareth takes offense at the carpenter’s son, and “he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.” The parable of the soils walks straight out of the story and into his hometown.

A housekeeping note that matters: end tonight by telling the group to bring their sealed Take-Home Sheet 1 next week, without explaining why. Build the anticipation; next session is Caesarea Philippi.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Isaiah 6:9–10.** The hardening commission given to Isaiah, quoted in full at 13:14–15: hearing without understanding. Parables enact this judgment while still holding the door open.
- **Psalms 78:2.** “I will open my mouth in parables”: Matthew’s fulfillment citation at 13:35. Psalm 78 retells Israel’s whole story as a parable; Jesus does the same for the kingdom.
- **Ezekiel 17:22–24; 31:6.** The great tree in whose branches the birds of every sort nest: the backdrop of the mustard seed, where Israel’s prophetic image of a kingdom sheltering the nations is claimed for a garden herb grown large.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Sermons on the Gospels)

Preaching on the weeds against the Donatists, who demanded a Church of the pure, Augustine counsels patience with the mixed field: those who are weeds today may be wheat tomorrow, and the reckless uprooter destroys what God is still growing. The separation is certain, but it belongs to the harvest and the Harvester, not to us.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

Chrysostom points to the mustard seed and the leaven as prophecies the Church itself now proves: from twelve obscure men the faith has filled the world, as quietly and irresistibly as leaven works through dough. The smallness of the beginning, he says, is the demonstration of the power.

Voices of the Church: St. Gregory the Great (Forty Gospel Homilies, Homily 11)

Gregory reads the treasure as the desire for heaven, and the field in which it lies hidden as the discipline of the heavenly life. The finder hides what he has found because a longing paraded before human praise lies open to plunder by malicious spirits, as a treasure carried openly on the road invites robbers. Guarded in hiddenness, the desire is kept safe, and in his joy he sells all he has and buys the field: what looks from outside like renunciation is, from inside, the shrewdest purchase

ever made.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 543–546.** Everyone is called to enter the kingdom, which belongs to the poor and the little ones; Jesus' parables invite hearers into the kingdom's mystery and demand a radical choice: to gain it, one must give everything. Words are not enough; deeds are required.
- **CCC 827.** The Church, holy in her Lord, clasps sinners to her bosom and is always in need of purification; in everyone, weeds and good grain grow together until the end of time. This article quotes tonight's parable directly.
- **CCC 1036.** The parables' harvest imagery grounds the Church's sober preaching on judgment: the sorting at the close of the age is real, and the time to become wheat is now.

Thread Watch

- **Emmanuel thread (develop, quietly).** The leaven is IN the dough, the treasure IN the field: the kingdom's presence in this season is hidden but real, working from inside. God-with-us has become God-within-the-ordinary.
- **Fulfillment thread (develop).** One more citation for the count: Psalm 78:2 at 13:35. The scribe of 13:52, bringing out things new and old, is also this whole study's method in one verse.
- **Sealed guess (activate).** Close the session with the instruction: bring your sealed Take-Home Sheet 1 next week. Answer no questions about why. Anticipation is part of the payoff.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain why Jesus teaches in parables and how a parable both reveals and conceals.
2. Participants can walk through the four soils and name their own current soil honestly.
3. Participants discover that the wheat-and-weeds and the dragnet describe a kingdom that remains mixed under the King's patient permission until the harvest, and hear the strongest invisible-church objection answered from these parables.
4. Participants can articulate the paired logic of mustard seed and leaven (scale) and treasure and pearl (worth).
5. Participants leave with their sealed sheet assignment for next week and rising anticipation.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer and sealed-sheet instruction 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: drop the Dig Deeper box on the scribe trained for the kingdom (saves about 4 minutes), then treat the treasure and pearl in a single question rather than two movements (saves about 5 minutes). Do not cut the weeds-and-wheat sequence or the steelman chain, and do not skip the sealed-sheet instruction.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 7 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Kingdom in Parables

Matthew 13 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you sat in a boat and told stories, and two thousand years later the stories are still telling us. Give us ears to hear tonight. Break up our hard paths, deepen our shallow places, pull the thorns that choke your word, and make us good soil, thirty, sixty, a hundredfold. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. What story, from a book, a movie, or your family, has actually changed how you live? Why do stories get past our defenses when arguments cannot?
2. Which of the seven parables you read this week did you understand least? Just name it; we may get to it.

Build (55 minutes)

Why Parables?

1. Read Matthew 13:10–17. The disciples ask the question we would ask: why parables? **Live discovery:** Jesus answers from Isaiah's commissioning; have someone find Isaiah 6:8–10 and read it. What double work does a parable do, according to Jesus? What determines whether a parable opens or closes to a hearer?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Parables reveal and conceal at once. To the open, they carry the secrets of the kingdom in images that lodge for life; to the closed, they are riddles that pass through without effect, enacting Isaiah's grim commission of hearing without understanding. The variable is the hearer's heart: a parable is a mirror, and what you hear in it reveals what you have become. Yet the quotation itself ends with the possibility of turning and being healed (13:15), and it is the hearers who have closed their own eyes. Pastorally, then, we may add a hope the text does not state outright: a riddle can be returned to, and a door left ajar can still be pushed. And Jesus blesses the disciples' eyes and ears: prophets and righteous men longed to see what they see.

Four Soils, One Seed

2. Read Matthew 13:3–9 and its interpretation in 13:18–23. Name the four soils and what defeats the seed in each of the first three. What is the one variable in this parable, and what does that answer about the rejection we watched gather in chapters 11 and 12? Then the personal question, for silent reflection only: which soil are you this season?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The path (the evil one snatches what was never understood), the rocky ground (joy without root, gone at the first trouble), the thorns (the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke it), and the good soil (hears, understands, bears fruit at thirty, sixty, a hundredfold). The seed is never the variable; the soil is. This quietly answers the scandal of chapters 11–12: the word was truly preached and truly rejected, and the failure was in soils, not in the Sower. Leave the last question in silence; soil can be worked, and that is what Lent, confession, and this study are for.

The Field Nobody Gets to Weed

3. Read Matthew 13:24–30, then Jesus' own interpretation in 13:36–43. Answer strictly from the text: who sowed the good seed, who sowed the weeds, what do the servants want to do, why does the master forbid it, and who finally does the sorting, when? Then read the dragnet in 13:47–50: what does the net gather, and where does the sorting happen?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The Son of man sows good seed; the enemy, the devil, oversows weeds while men sleep. The servants want to purge the field immediately; the master forbids it because uprooting now would tear out wheat with the weeds, and he reserves the sorting for the harvesters, the angels, at the close of the age. The dragnet gathers fish of every kind, and the sorting happens afterward, on the shore, at the end. Twice in one chapter, Jesus describes the kingdom's present season as mixed, permitted so by the King until the harvest, with the separating reserved to God. Hold this; it is about to matter.

Build Then Press: Is the True Church Invisible?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

A serious strand of Protestant theology, running from the Reformers through the classic confessions, distinguishes the invisible Church from the visible. The visible church, on this account, is real and necessary: it preaches the word, administers the sacraments, and is admittedly a mixed body containing hypocrites and nominal believers. But the true Church, the Church of the creed, is invisible: the whole company of the elect of every age, known with certainty to God alone, scattered through all the visible communions and coinciding exactly with none of them. No institution you can locate on a map, Catholic or otherwise, may simply claim to be the one Church Christ founded; at best it is a more or less faithful outpost of a body only God can see. History seems to testify for the objection: scandalous popes, corrupt clergy, lukewarm pews. Notice that this position does not demand a pure visible community; it denies that any visible community as such is the Church. It is theologically serious, and every scandal in Catholic history hands it fresh ammunition. Let it stand at full strength.

4. Now press with the parables still open in front of you. According to Jesus, is the mixed condition of the kingdom's field a corruption of his plan or a description of it? Who wanted the field purified immediately, and whose side of that argument does the invisible-church instinct resemble? What does the master say happens to wheat when servants weed on their own authority?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Jesus himself describes the kingdom in this age as a mixed field and a mixed net, and he attributes the mixture to enemy action his own patience tolerates until harvest. The demand for an immediately pure community is in the parable, on the lips of the servants, and the master overrules it: pull the weeds now and you tear out wheat, because only the harvest reveals which is which, and some of today's weeds, as St. Augustine preached against the Donatists, are tomorrow's wheat. A Church without sinners is promised, at the close of the age, by angels; a Church without sinners now would require exactly the premature uprooting the master forbids.

Concede what the objection guards, because it is true: holiness matters, scandal is real evil, and no Catholic may shrug at corruption. The Catechism says it without flinching: the Church clasps sinners to her bosom and is always in need of purification (CCC 827). But sinners in the visible Church do not refute her claim; they confirm her Lord's own description of the kingdom's present form. The invisible-church theory solves the scandal of the weeds by relocating the kingdom out of history's one planted field, and the parable never makes that move; the master keeps the one field and defers the sorting. Jesus says plainly that the field is the world (13:38); the Church is the kingdom's present form within that world, and she reads the parable's logic as her own: in everyone, weeds and good grain grow together until the end of time (CCC 827). The Church you can find on a map, with sinners at her altars from the beginning, is not disproved by that mixture; she is living inside the season her Lord described, and he has asked for our patience with her, and her patience with us.

Notice what the strongest form of the objection concedes: the visible church is mixed, exactly as the parables say. The remaining dispute is whether the Church Christ founded can be identified with any visible body at all. Here the parables still speak. The kingdom in this age is one field the master planted, one net let down, one tree the birds can find and nest in; Jesus does not answer the scandal of the weeds by relocating the kingdom into invisibility, he keeps the one planted, findable field and defers the sorting. And Matthew's Jesus founds something locatable: a church built on Peter (16:18) to which a brother's sin can be told (18:17), which no purely invisible fellowship could ever hear. Catholic teaching agrees that God alone knows with certainty who will be gathered as wheat; what it denies is that the Church of the creed can be severed from the visible body Christ founded, for the two form one reality, and grace runs through the visible means he left.

Small, Hidden, and Worth Everything

5. Read Matthew 13:31–33. What do the mustard seed and the leaven each say about how the kingdom grows? **Live discovery:** the full-grown tree with birds nesting is borrowed furniture; have someone find Ezekiel 17:22–24 and read it. What was Ezekiel's tree, and what is Jesus claiming for his mustard plant?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The mustard seed: smallest of beginnings, disproportionate growth, until the birds of the air, in Ezekiel an image of the nations, nest in its branches. Ezekiel's sprig planted by God on Israel's mountain height was the restored Davidic kingdom sheltering every wing; Jesus claims that promise for the movement currently consisting of twelve men in a boat. The leaven adds the

manner: hidden inside the dough, working silently, unstoppable, through three measures of flour, enough to feed a village. St. John Chrysostom's point stands: twenty centuries later, the size of the tree is itself the argument.

6. Read Matthew 13:44–46. In both tiny parables a man sells everything he has. What one word in the treasure parable keeps this from being a story about grim sacrifice? And what is the difference between the two finders?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

“In his joy.” The finder does not grit his teeth and pay a terrible price; he liquidates everything, delighted, because he knows what the field is worth. The kingdom does not extract a sacrifice; it reveals a bargain. The pearl merchant is explicitly searching; the treasure-finder is simply said to find, and the scene suggests a discovery he was not looking for. The kingdom seems to be found both ways, by surprise and by long seeking, and it costs both finders the same happy everything.

Dig Deeper: The Scribe with Two Treasures

Matthew 13:52 blesses the scribe trained for the kingdom, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. It is as close to a self-portrait as the evangelist paints, and it is also this study's method in a single verse: every week we read the new Gospel with the old Scriptures open beside it, and each keeps unlocking the other.

Send (12 minutes)

1. Where has scandal or the sin of Christians, maybe your own, tempted you to give up on the visible Church? What changes if the mixed field is the Master's own description rather than evidence against him?
2. The finders sold everything in joy. What are you still holding that keeps the field unpurchased, and what would selling it look like this month?

Live It This Week

- Reread the parable you understood least, once a day, and let it interrogate you rather than the reverse.
- Pray for one “weed”, someone whose place in the Church scandalizes or irritates you, remembering that today's weeds may be tomorrow's wheat, and that someone may be praying the same way about you.
- Do one hidden, leaven-like act inside an ordinary structure of your life: your kitchen, your shop floor, your group chat. Tell no one; let it work.

Closing Prayer

Lord of the harvest, your kingdom is smaller than we wanted and greater than we dreamed: a seed, a pinch of leaven, a treasure under ordinary ground. Give us patience with your mixed field and mercy on

our fellow weeds, joy enough to sell everything, and good soil for your word. And gather us, at the close of the age, shining like the sun in the kingdom of our Father. Amen.

Before You Leave

Give this instruction and answer no questions about it: bring your sealed Take-Home Sheet 1 next week. If anyone has lost theirs, tell them to come anyway; next week they will understand why.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 13:44 (RSV2CE): *“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 7 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The Kingdom in Parables · Matthew 13

Primary Text

- Matthew 13:10–17 · Matthew 13:3–9 with 13:18–23 · Matthew 13:24–30 with 13:36–43 · Matthew 13:47–50
- Matthew 13:31–33 · Matthew 13:44–46 · Matthew 13:52 · Matthew 13:53–58

Live Discovery Passages

- Isaiah 6:8–10 (why parables) · Ezekiel 17:22–24 (the tree and the birds)

Background Passages

- Psalm 78:2 (quoted at 13:35) · Ezekiel 31:6 (the great cedar) · CCC 827 text for the steelman landing

Catechism

- CCC 543–546 · CCC 827 · CCC 1036

Memory Verse

- Matthew 13:44

Do Not Forget

- Closing instruction: bring your sealed Take-Home Sheet 1 next week. No explanations.

You Are Peter

Matthew 14–16 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the scene the whole study has been walking toward: at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks the question they sealed in an envelope seven weeks ago, Peter answers it, and Jesus answers Peter with a new name, a rock, keys, and a Church. Along the way they watch Jesus feed thousands in the wilderness, walk on the sea speaking God's own name of self-disclosure, and grant a Gentile mother's plea, before the road turns hard toward Jerusalem.

Catholic Touchstone. Peter's confession and Peter's office: the rock, the keys of the kingdom read against Isaiah 22, and binding and loosing. Tonight also honors the full text, including "Get behind me, Satan" five verses later, because the office never rested on Peter's personal perfection, and that is precisely the Catholic point.

What You Need to Know

The feeding of the five thousand (14:13–21) is thick with Exodus memory: a crowd in a lonely place, bread given in the wilderness, and twelve baskets left over, a number that recalls the twelve tribes, the New Israel. Elisha once fed a hundred men with twenty loaves and had some left (2 Kings 4:42–44); Jesus feeds thousands with five. Watch the verbs of verse 19: he took, blessed, broke, and gave. Matthew will use those four verbs in exactly that order one more time, in an upper room. Plant nothing aloud; the group should feel the echo when it comes.

The walking on the sea (14:22–33) escalates everything. The group learned from Psalm 107 in Session 5 that the Lord alone stills storms; Job 9:8 adds that God alone "trampled the waves of the sea." Jesus' word of comfort, "Take heart, it is I," is in Greek ego eimi, I AM, an echo of God's self-disclosure at the burning bush, where the Greek Old Testament reads ego eimi ho on, I am the One who is. Hold the point with a light hand, the phrase can be ordinary self-identification, but Matthew has stacked the scene so that the boat's conclusion is the only sane one: "Truly you are the Son of God." Note also the first Peter cameo: bold enough to step out, human enough to sink, wise enough to pray the Gospel's shortest prayer, "Lord, save me."

The Canaanite woman (15:21–28) is a Son of David thread event of the first order: a Gentile, from the old enemy stock of Canaan, addresses Israel's Messiah by his royal Jewish title and begs for mercy. Jesus' apparent harshness has long been read, with the Fathers, as a testing that draws out and displays her faith; she takes the humble place and reasons from inside it, and Jesus, who marveled at one Gentile centurion, now publicly crowns a Gentile mother: "O woman, great is your faith." The feeding of the four thousand that follows is often read as taking place in largely Gentile territory, a hint drawn from the surrounding itinerary and from the crowd glorifying the God of Israel (15:31); on that reading the two feedings quietly enact bread for Israel and bread for the nations.

Caesarea Philippi (16:13–20) is the Gospel's continental divide. The location matters: a pagan city at the foot of Mount Hermon, built beside a cliff face of shrines, with a cave sometimes associated in the ancient world with the underworld. Against that backdrop of dead gods, Jesus asks the two questions, the crowd-sourced one and the direct one, and Simon confesses: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus' reply gives him a beatitude, a revelation claim (flesh and blood did not reveal this), a new name, and an office. On the name: Jesus spoke Aramaic, and scholars across traditions reconstruct the underlying sentence as “you are Kepha, and on this kepha I will build my Church”, one word, twice; the Aramaic name is preserved in the New Testament itself as Cephas (John 1:42; Galatians 2:9). Greek is forced to inflect it (*Petros* for the man's name because *petra* is feminine and cannot name a man), which is where tonight's steelman lives. The keys come from Isaiah 22, tonight's crown-jewel discovery: the office of the royal steward in the house of David, an office under the king, over the household, and, crucially, an office that passes from one holder to the next, since Isaiah 22 is itself an oracle about succession in that office.

Do not soften what follows. A few verses after the keys (16:21–23), Peter rebukes the first passion prediction and hears the harshest words Jesus speaks to any disciple: “Get behind me, Satan.” Matthew places rock and stumbling stone side by side deliberately. The office is Christ's gift and Christ's guarantee; the man remains weak, and the Gospel never hides it. This honesty is not a problem for the Catholic reading; it is the Catholic reading: the gates of Hades shall not prevail because of the Builder, not the building material.

Tonight's sealed guess ceremony. Structure the moment carefully. After Build question 3, BEFORE anyone reads Matthew 16, have participants open their sealed sheets from Session 1 and silently reread what they wrote to the question “Who do you say Jesus is, and how will the world come to know him?” Invite two or three volunteers to share. Then have someone read 16:13–17 aloud, and let the room discover that they have spent seven weeks inside Jesus' own question, and that Jesus' response to a right answer is a blessing: flesh and blood has not revealed this. The second half of their guess, how the world will come to know him, is answered in the same breath: “on this rock I will build my Church.” The Church is Christ's own answer to their question. Do not rush this sequence; it is the payoff the study was built around.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **2 Kings 4:42–44.** Elisha multiplies loaves with some left over; the pattern Jesus fulfills at a scale no prophet touched.
- **Job 9:8.** God alone tramples the waves of the sea; the walking on the water is a theophany, not a stunt.
- **Exodus 3:14.** I AM: the self-name of God echoed, with a light hand, in “Take heart, it is I.”
- **Isaiah 22:15–25.** The key of the house of David laid on the steward's shoulder: he shall open and none shall shut. The background of the keys of the kingdom, and an office shown in the very act of succession.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Cyprian of Carthage (On the Unity of the Church)

Writing in the third century, Cyprian teaches that the Lord built the Church upon Peter and established one chair, so that the Church's unity would have a visible origin and sign. The other

apostles were what Peter was, endowed with a like fellowship of honor and power, but the beginning proceeds from unity, and the primacy is given to Peter to show the Church is one.

Voices of the Church: St. Leo the Great (Sermons on the Anniversary of His Election)

Leo preaches that the strength Christ conferred on Peter is not extinguished by Peter's death: in Peter's see, Peter's confession and Peter's care continue, for the Lord who made him the rock still upholds through him the whole Church's firmness. The solidity given to Peter is bestowed through Peter on his successors.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

Chrysostom marvels at the exchange at Caesarea Philippi: the Father reveals the Son to Peter, and the Son in turn declares Peter blessed, renames him, and entrusts him with the keys. He who once could not bear a servant girl's question would become, after grace perfected him, the shepherd Christ set over his flock; the change itself is the proof of what grace can build on weak stone.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 442.** Peter's confession does not originate in flesh and blood but in the Father's revelation; from the beginning this confession is the Church's foundation stone of faith.
- **CCC 552–553.** Because of the faith he confessed, Peter remains the unshakable rock of the Church; the keys signify authority to govern the house of God, and the power to bind and loose means authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgments, and to make disciplinary decisions in the Church.
- **CCC 881.** The Lord made Simon alone the rock of his Church and gave him the keys; yet this pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope.

Thread Watch

- **Sealed guess (RESOLVE).** Tonight the envelope opens. Follow the ceremony sequence in What You Need to Know and in the Discussion Guide exactly; the order (open sheets, then read the passage) is what makes the moment land.
- **Peter thread (flower).** “First, Simon” from Session 6 now has its explanation. If the participant who noticed it two weeks ago is present, hand them the moment.
- **Emmanuel thread (develop).** “Take heart, it is I” on the sea, and God-with-us now promising to build and inhabit a Church the gates of Hades cannot beat.
- **Son of David thread (develop).** The Canaanite woman: the first Gentile to use the royal title, and she pairs it, like the blind men, with a cry for mercy. The list is growing; keep it.
- **Bread thread (plant, silently).** Took, blessed, broke, gave. Say nothing. It returns in an upper room.

Session Goals

1. Participants experience the sealed guess resolution and connect their own answer to Peter's confession and to the Church.
2. Participants discover Isaiah 22 and can explain the keys as the transferable office of the steward in the house of David.
3. Participants hear the strongest Protestant reading of "on this rock" and can answer it honestly, including what it gets right.
4. Participants can hold together rock and "Get behind me, Satan": an office guaranteed by Christ, held by weak men.
5. Participants recognize the mounting divine self-disclosure of the feeding and the sea crossing.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 12 min · Build 58 min (including 8 minutes reserved for the sealed guess ceremony) · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: drop Build question 2 on the Canaanite woman to a read-and-comment (saves about 6 minutes), then drop the Dig Deeper on Caesarea Philippi's geography (saves about 4 minutes). Do not cut, rush, or reorder the sealed guess ceremony, the Isaiah 22 discovery, or the steelman chain.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 8 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

You Are Peter

Matthew 14–16 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Father, seven weeks ago we wrote down our answer to a question we did not yet know was yours. Tonight, ask it of us again. Reveal your Son to us as you revealed him to Simon, not by flesh and blood but by your own gift, and build us into the Church against which the gates of Hades shall not prevail. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (12 minutes)

1. Has anyone ever given you a new name, a nickname that stuck, and did it change anything about you?
2. Whose opinion of you matters most, and why that person?

Build (58 minutes)

Bread in the Wilderness

1. Read Matthew 14:13–21. What Old Testament scenes does this echo, given everything this study has traced? **Live discovery:** have someone read 2 Kings 4:42–44. What did Elisha do, and at what scale does Jesus do it? Finally, read verse 19 again slowly and list Jesus' four actions with the bread, in order.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Bread given to a crowd in a lonely place recalls the manna in the wilderness, with twelve baskets left over, a number that recalls the twelve tribes of the New Israel. Elisha fed a hundred with twenty loaves; Jesus feeds five thousand men, besides women and children, with five. The four verbs: he took, blessed, broke, and gave. File that exact sequence away without comment; Matthew is not done with it.

2. Read Matthew 14:22–33. We learned from Psalm 107 who stills storms. **Live discovery:** have someone read Job 9:8. Who alone tramples the waves of the sea? Now listen to Jesus' exact words of comfort in verse 27, and to what the boat concludes in verse 33. And watch Peter: what is admirable in him here, what is human, and what is his prayer when he sinks?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Job says God alone trampled the waves of the sea; the One walking on them is making a claim with his feet. His comfort, “Take heart, it is I,” is in Greek ego eimi, I AM, echoing the name God speaks from the burning bush, which the Greek Old Testament renders ego eimi ho on. Hold it lightly, the phrase can be ordinary self-identification, but stacked on Psalm 107 and Job 9 the boat draws the only sane conclusion: “Truly you are the Son of God.” And Peter: bold enough to ask, faith enough to walk, human enough to look at the wind and sink, and wise enough to pray the shortest prayer in

the Gospel, “Lord, save me.” Remember tonight that this is the same man about to be handed keys.

3. Read Matthew 15:21–28. Track the woman's words: what title does she use in verse 22, and what does our running list say about who has used it so far? How does she answer the hard saying about the children's bread, and what does Jesus finally declare about her?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David”: a Canaanite, from Israel's oldest enemy stock, is the first Gentile to use the royal title, and like the blind men she pairs it with a plea for mercy. Our list so far: the blind, the desperate crowds, and now a Gentile mother, while the experts stay silent. She takes the humble place under the table and argues from inside it, and Jesus, who marveled at one Gentile centurion, crowns a second Gentile publicly: O woman, great is your faith. The children's bread is already reaching the nations.

The Sealed Guess: Open It Now

Leader, follow this order exactly. First: everyone takes out their sealed Take-Home Sheet 1, opens it, and silently rereads what they wrote seven weeks ago to the question, “Who do you say Jesus is, and how will the world come to know him?” Second: invite two or three volunteers to share what they wrote, with no correction or commentary from anyone. Third, and only then: have someone read Matthew 16:13–17 aloud. Let the room react before you say anything at all.

4. Now talk about what just happened. What two questions does Jesus ask, and why does the second one change the temperature of the conversation? What does Jesus say about where Peter's answer came from? And notice: the second half of your sealed question, how will the world come to know him, is about to be answered in the very next verse.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The crowd question is safe: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, opinions at arm's length. “But who do YOU say that I am” permits no distance; it is the question every session of this study has been sharpening, and it was your sealed question all along. Peter confesses: the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus calls him blessed and names the source: flesh and blood has not revealed this, but my Father who is in heaven. Right answers about Jesus are gifts before they are achievements. And how will the world come to know him? Jesus answers that himself, immediately: “on this rock I will build my Church.” The Church is Christ's own plan for how your sealed question gets answered for the world.

Dig Deeper: Why Caesarea Philippi?

Jesus staged this scene in a pagan city at the base of Mount Hermon, beside a cliff of shrines to dead gods and a cave the ancients associated with the underworld. Against that rock face of failed religion he asks who he is, and speaks of a Church against which the gates of Hades, death's own fortress, shall not prevail. The geography is a sermon.

Build Then Press: Is Peter the Rock?

5. Read Matthew 16:18–20 slowly before the steelman.

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

The classic Protestant case is textual and serious. In the Greek, Jesus says “you are *Petros*, and on this *petra* I will build my Church”: two different words. *Petros* can mean a stone; *petra* means bedrock. So, the argument runs, Jesus is contrasting Peter the pebble with the true bedrock, which is either Peter's confession of faith or Christ himself, whom Scripture elsewhere calls the rock (1 Corinthians 10:4). Some Church Fathers, including St. Augustine at times, read the rock as Peter's confession or as Christ. And the context seems to agree: five verses later this “rock” is called Satan and a stumbling stone. Would Christ build his indestructible Church on a man who folds at a servant girl's question? Surely the Church stands on the confessed Christ, not on Simon of Galilee. Let this reading stand at its full height; it is careful, biblical, and patristically aware.

6. Now press. Jesus was not speaking Greek in this scene; he was speaking Aramaic, and Simon's new name in Aramaic appears in the New Testament itself: Cephas, *Kepha* (John 1:42; Galatians 2:9). Reconstruct the sentence as Jesus said it. Then ask why Greek could not keep one word for both halves. **Live discovery:** have someone read Isaiah 22:15–25, the only place in the Old Testament where a key of the house of David is laid on a man's shoulder. What is the office described there, whom does the steward serve, over whom does he have authority, and what happens to the office when its holder is removed?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

In Aramaic the sentence would have run “you are Kepha, and on this kepha I will build my Church”: one word, twice, an unmistakable wordplay on the name Jesus solemnly bestows on Simon here, the naming John 1:42 records being promised at their first meeting. Greek is forced to inflect it because *petra* is feminine and cannot serve as a man's name; *Petros* is simply its masculine form, and in first-century Greek the two words no longer carried a firm pebble-versus-bedrock distinction. The grammar of the whole sentence runs one way: you are Rock, and on this rock. Renaming, in Scripture, is never decoration: Abram became Abraham to become the father of nations, and Simon becomes Rock to become a foundation.

Then the keys. Isaiah 22 describes the royal steward of the house of David: an office under the king, with authority over the king's household, the key on his shoulder, what he opens none shall shut. And Isaiah 22 is itself a succession oracle: Shebna is removed from the office and Eliakim is installed in it, because the office outlives its holders. When the Son of David hands a man the keys of the kingdom, a first-century Jew hears an office being filled: not a replacement king, but the king's steward, with real, delegated, transferable authority. That is why the Catholic Church sees in Peter not only a man but a chair.

Now concede what the objection gets right, because it gets real things right. The rock is not Peter apart from his confession: it is Peter confessing, Peter as gifted by the Father, and the Fathers who read the rock as the confession or as Christ are seeing true facets of the same jewel, not contradicting it; Peter matters precisely and only because of whose he is and what he confessed. And yes, five verses later he is called Satan. Matthew put rock and stumbling block side by side on purpose: the office is Christ's gift and carries Christ's guarantee, while the man remains weak,

sinful, and in need of grace, from Simon to every successor since. The gates of Hades shall not prevail: that is a promise about the Builder, not a compliment to the building material. A Church founded on a proven-weak man and still standing twenty centuries later is not an embarrassment to the promise; it is the evidence for it.

The Rock and the Stumbling Stone

7. Read Matthew 16:21–27. What does Jesus begin to teach “from that time,” how does Peter respond, and what does Jesus call him? Why might Matthew place this immediately after the keys? And what does Jesus then say discipleship costs everyone?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

From that time Jesus begins showing them the cross: suffering, death, and on the third day rising. Peter, fresh from his blessing, rebukes the Lord he just confessed, and hears “Get behind me, Satan”: the rock has become a stumbling stone by thinking the thoughts of men. Matthew’s placement is deliberate honesty: the office does not rest on Peter’s perfection, and the Gospel never pretends otherwise. Then the terms for everyone: deny yourself, take up your cross, follow; whoever would save his life will lose it. The Messiah just confessed is a crucified Messiah, and confessing him means walking his road.

Send (12 minutes)

1. Compare what you sealed seven weeks ago with what you would write tonight. What has changed, and what changed it?
2. Jesus’ answer to “how will the world come to know him” is his Church, including the weak stones in this room. Who in your life is waiting, without knowing it, on your confession?

Live It This Week

- Rewrite your answer to the sealed question on the back of your Session 1 sheet, dated tonight. Keep both versions; compare them again when this study ends.
- Pray for the successor of Peter by name this week, and for your bishop: weak stones carrying a guaranteed office deserve the Church’s prayers.
- Pray Peter’s sinking prayer, “Lord, save me,” in the moment this week when you feel the wind.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, what flesh and blood could not reveal, your Father has given us to see. Thank you for asking us your question before we knew it was yours. Build us into your Church on the rock you chose, guard your servant Peter’s successor, and when we look at the wind and sink, catch us as you caught him. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 16:16 (RSV2CE): “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*”

EMMANUEL · SESSION 8 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

You Are Peter · Matthew 14–16

Primary Text

• Matthew 14:13–21 · Matthew 14:22–33 · Matthew 15:21–28 · Matthew 16:13–17 · Matthew 16:18–20 · Matthew 16:21–27

Live Discovery Passages

• 2 Kings 4:42–44 (Elisha's loaves) · Job 9:8 (who tramples the sea) · Isaiah 22:15–25 (the key of the house of David)

Background Passages

• Exodus 3:14 (I AM, held lightly) · Psalm 107:23–30 (recall from Session 5) · John 1:42 and Galatians 2:9 (Cephas / Kepha) · 1 Corinthians 10:4 (for the steelman) · Genesis 17:5 (Abram renamed)

Catechism

• CCC 442 · CCC 552–553 · CCC 881

Memory Verse

• Matthew 16:16

Do Not Forget

• Sealed guess ceremony order: open sheets FIRST, volunteers share, THEN read 16:13–17. Reserve 8 minutes.

The Transfigured Christ and His Church

Matthew 17-18 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the Transfiguration as a new Sinai, with the group finding the Exodus parallels themselves, and hear the Father's command that fulfills Deuteronomy's ancient promise of a prophet like Moses: listen to him. Then they enter the fourth great discourse, where Jesus teaches his Church how to live as a family: greatness as littleness, war on scandal, the shepherd's math, a real process for sin in the community that ends at "tell it to the church," and forgiveness without a counter.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church as a visible community with real authority to bind and loose, the promise of Christ's presence where two or three gather in his name, and forgiveness as the family resemblance of the forgiven.

What You Need to Know

The Transfiguration (17:1-8) is built out of Sinai materials, and tonight the group excavates them: after six days (Exodus 24:16, the cloud covered Sinai six days), a high mountain, a select company taken up, a face shining like the sun (Exodus 34:29, Moses' face shone from speaking with God), a bright cloud of glory, and a voice from the cloud. Moses and Elijah appear, the two men of the Old Testament who met God on that mountain, standing for the Law and the Prophets, everything Jesus said he came to fulfil. The differences preach louder than the parallels: Moses' face shone with reflected light; Jesus' face is the source, his garments white as light itself. And the voice repeats the Jordan declaration, this is my beloved Son, then adds a command that first-century ears would catch instantly: "listen to him." Deuteronomy 18:15 promised a prophet like Moses, and commanded of him exactly those words: him you shall heed. The New Moses thread the group resolved on the mountain of the Beatitudes is here ratified by the Father's own voice.

St. Leo the Great identifies the Transfiguration's purpose precisely: coming six days after the first passion prediction and Peter's disastrous rebuke, it removes the scandal of the cross in advance, showing the three future witnesses of Gethsemane the glory that the crucified One possesses by right. The descent from the mountain returns immediately to that hard road: the disciples' failed exorcism, the second passion prediction, and their distress.

The temple tax scene (17:24-27) is small and strange and worth one good question. The collectors ask Peter, not Jesus, whether his teacher pays the tax, another quiet marker of Peter's spokesman role. Jesus' argument is that kings' sons do not pay the king's tax, so the Son of the Father whose house the temple is owes nothing; he pays anyway, not to give offense. And the coin from the fish's mouth is a shekel, precisely enough "for me and for yourself": the Lord folds Peter in with himself, two freemen paying together.

Chapter 18 is the fourth discourse, the Church's family rule. It opens with the disciples' worst recurring question, who is the greatest, answered by a child stood in the middle: unless you turn and become like children, entrance itself is in question, and greatness is humility. Then the ferocity about scandal, millstones and cut-off hands, language whose violence measures how seriously heaven takes the corruption of little ones. The lost sheep gives the Father's math: the ninety-nine left on the hills, the one sought, and "it is not the will of my Father that one of these little ones should perish."

Verses 15-20 are the discourse's doctrinal center and tonight's steelman ground. Jesus lays out a real, ordered process for sin inside the community: private correction, then two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15's standard), then "tell it to the church", *ekklesia*, and the unrepentant who refuse even the church are to be treated as "a Gentile and a tax collector," which is excommunication in seed form, medicine aimed at repentance. Two things follow that demand attention. First, the process assumes the church is findable, visible, and final: the instruction requires a community you can locate and address, and within the process there is no appeal beyond her. Second, Jesus repeats to the apostles as a body the binding-and-loosing formula spoken to Peter: whatever you (plural) bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. Tonight's steelman lives in the relation between those two texts. Then the pearl of 18:20: where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Let the group hear the Emmanuel bell ring; a rabbi's saying held that where two sit with the words of Torah between them, the divine presence rests, and Jesus places himself, personally, in that seat.

The discourse closes with Peter's generous-sounding question, forgive seven times?, exploded by the answer, seventy times seven, and the parable of the unforgiving servant: a debt of ten thousand talents, an unpayable national-treasury sum, forgiven outright, and a hundred denarii choked out of a fellow servant. The arithmetic is the argument, and the ending is the Sermon's petition ("as we forgive") in narrative form, with a warning Jesus does not soften: from your heart.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- Exodus 24:15-18. Six days of cloud on Sinai, then the voice: the Transfiguration's blueprint, discovered live tonight.
- Exodus 34:29-35. Moses' shining face, reflected glory beside the Son's native light.
- **Deuteronomy 18:15.** The prophet like Moses: him you shall heed. The Father's "listen to him" quotes the promise back.
- **Deuteronomy 19:15.** Two or three witnesses: the evidentiary standard Jesus builds into his Church's process.
- Ezekiel 34:11-16. The Lord himself will seek the lost sheep: the shepherd's math of Matthew 18 has the Father's own signature.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Leo the Great (Sermon on the Transfiguration)

Leo preaches that the great purpose of the Transfiguration was to remove the scandal of the cross from the hearts of the disciples: the brightness of the kingdom was shown in advance so that when the Lord hung in apparent defeat, the chosen witnesses would know that glory, not ruin, was being accomplished. The whole body of Christ may take heart: what shone in the Head is promised to the

members.

Voices of the Church: St. Ignatius of Antioch (Letter to the Smyrnaeans)

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, remembered in early tradition as a disciple of the apostle John, writing on his way to martyrdom in the opening years of the second century, already assumes what tonight's Gospel implies: the Church is visible, gathered, and ordered. Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, he writes, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church, the first surviving use of that name. A church you can tell things to is a church you can find.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

On the unforgiving servant, Chrysostom presses the arithmetic: nothing we forgive one another can be compared to what God has forgiven us, a hundred coins against ten thousand talents. The servant's sin was not remembering his own debt wrongly but forgetting it entirely the moment he was free; mercy received and not passed on curdles into a worse debt than the first.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 554-556. The Transfiguration gives a foretaste of the kingdom and of the resurrection: for a moment Jesus shows the divine glory, confirming Peter's confession, and reveals that he must go by way of the cross to enter it.
- CCC 1443-1445. Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God: the words bind and loose mean that whoever is excluded or received back into the community is excluded or received by God; the apostles' authority in Matthew 18:18 continues in the Church's ministry of forgiveness.
- **CCC 881.** The binding and loosing given to Peter alone in Matthew 16 was also assigned to the college of apostles united to its head: a college with a head, never a headless college and never a head without the body.
- **CCC 2843.** Forgiveness "from the heart": it is not in our power not to feel an offense, but the heart that offers its hurt to the Spirit finds memory transformed into intercession.

Thread Watch

- **Emmanuel thread (major beat).** "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Let someone in the group connect it to 1:23 if they can; affirm it warmly and say the thread has one more note to sound. Do not resolve it fully.
- **New Moses thread (ratify).** Deuteronomy 18:15 discovered live: the Father's own voice certifies the pattern the group resolved in Session 3.
- **Peter thread (develop).** The collectors approach Peter; the coin pays "for me and for yourself." Small confirmations, no lecture needed.
- **Doing-the-word thread (develop, quietly).** Forgiveness "from your heart" is the Sermon's petition come back with teeth. The judgment scene of Session 12 is drawing closer.

Session Goals

1. Participants excavate the Sinai parallels of the Transfiguration themselves and hear Deuteronomy 18:15 inside the Father's command.
2. Participants can explain the four-step process of Matthew 18:15-17 and why it requires a visible church with final authority.
3. Participants hear the strongest Protestant argument that Matthew 18:18 flattens Peter's role, and can answer it from the texts.
4. Participants receive 18:20 as a real promise of presence and connect it to the study's master thread.
5. Participants run the arithmetic of the unforgiving servant on one live grudge of their own.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: drop the temple tax question and mention its Peter detail in one sentence (saves about 6 minutes), then drop the Dig Deeper on the rabbinic presence saying (saves about 3 minutes). Do not cut the Sinai excavation, the 18:15-17 sequence, or the steelman chain.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 9 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Transfigured Christ and His Church

Matthew 17-18 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Father, on the holy mountain you opened heaven for a moment and told us everything: this is my beloved Son; listen to him. Give us tonight the grace to listen, to him and to one another. Gather us in his name and keep his promise among us, for where two or three are gathered, he is in the midst. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Describe a moment, a view, a piece of music, a face, when something ordinary suddenly looked lit from inside. What did it do to you?
2. Growing up, how did your family handle it when someone wronged someone? Straight talk, silence, referees?

Build (55 minutes)

The Mountain of Light

1. **Read Matthew 17:1-8. Live discovery: this scene is built from older materials. Split into two groups: one reads Exodus 24:15-18, the other Exodus 34:29-35. Each group reports every parallel it can find with the Transfiguration, and then name the differences, because the differences are the point. Why these two visitors, Moses and Elijah?**

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Parallels: after six days, a mountain, a select company, a cloud of glory, a voice from the cloud, a shining face. Differences: Moses' face shone with borrowed light from speaking with God; Jesus' face shines like the sun from within, his garments white as light, because he is not near the glory, he is its source. Moses and Elijah are the Law and the Prophets, the two men who met God on Sinai, now standing on a mountain talking with the One who came to fulfil everything they wrote. Sinai has come back, and this time the glory has a human face.

2. **Live discovery.** The Father's voice repeats the Jordan blessing and adds three words: "listen to him." Have someone find Deuteronomy 18:15 and read it aloud. What did Moses promise, what did he command about that promised one, and what has the Father just done?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Moses promised that God would raise up a prophet like me from among your brethren, and commanded: him you shall heed. The Father's "listen to him" quotes Moses' command back over Jesus: the prophet like Moses has come, certified by the voice from the cloud with Moses himself standing witness. The New Moses pattern we watched resolve on the mountain of the Beatitudes is here ratified from heaven. And notice what the disciples see when the cloud lifts: no one but Jesus

only. The Law and the Prophets have said their piece; from now on, listen to him.

Dig Deeper: Why Now?

St. Leo the Great answers: six days earlier Jesus had announced the cross and Peter had rebuked him. The Transfiguration was given to remove the scandal of the cross in advance, so that the three who would later watch him sweat blood in Gethsemane would know that the crucified One goes to the cross owning this glory, not losing it.

3. Read Matthew 17:24-27, one of the Gospel's strangest small scenes. Whom do the collectors approach with their question, and what does that continue? What is Jesus' argument about kings' sons, and why does he pay anyway? And look closely at the coin: whom does it cover?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

They approach Peter, the group's recognized spokesman, as people have since Caesarea Philippi. Jesus' argument: earthly kings tax others, not their own sons, so the Son of the Father whose house the temple is owes nothing there. He pays anyway, not to give offense, freedom exercised as deference. And the shekel from the fish is exactly the tax for two: "give it to them for me and for yourself." The Lord folds Peter in with himself, two free sons paying together, one more quiet stroke in Matthew's portrait of this man's strange nearness to Jesus.

The Family Rule of the Kingdom

4. Read Matthew 18:1-6 and 18:10-14. What question opens the discourse, and what does Jesus put in the middle of the room as his answer? What is the shepherd's math in the parable, and what is the Father's stated will about little ones?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The disciples ask who is greatest, and Jesus answers by standing a child among them: unless you turn and become like children, greatness is not the issue, entrance is. Greatness in this kingdom is humility, and heaven's ferocity about scandal, where Jesus calls a millstone and the depths of the sea the better fate, measures how seriously the Father takes the little ones, whose angels behold his face. The shepherd leaves ninety-nine to seek the one, and the discourse states the Father's will without qualification: it is not his will that one of these little ones should perish. Ezekiel promised the Lord himself would come shepherding like this; here he is.

5. Read Matthew 18:15-20 slowly; this is the discourse's engine room. Lay out the four steps of the process for a brother's sin. What Old Testament standard is step two built on (see Deuteronomy 19:15)? At step three, what must be true about "the church" for the instruction "tell it to the church" to be followable? And what does verse 18 give to the apostles as a body?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Step one: go to him alone; the goal is gaining your brother, not winning a case. Step two: two or three witnesses, Deuteronomy's evidentiary standard, the matter is still being handled with justice, not gossip. Step three: tell it to the church, which means the church must be findable, visible, and identifiable; the command assumes a concrete community whose judgment can be heard and obeyed. Most Protestant traditions agree and practice real discipline in visible congregations; the live dispute, taken up below, is whether that visible authority has a universal head. Step four: the one who refuses even the church is treated as a Gentile and a tax collector, excommunication in seed, and remember from this same Gospel how Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors: as mission territory, medicine ordered toward return. Verse 18 then hands the apostles as a body the binding-and-loosing formula: real authority, ratified in heaven, exercised on earth.

Build Then Press: Does Matthew 18 Cancel Matthew 16?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

Here is a serious Protestant argument, and it engages the texts closely. Whatever binding and loosing meant when spoken to Peter in Matthew 16:19, the identical formula is spoken to the disciples collectively in 18:18. Therefore, the argument runs, Peter received nothing the others did not: the authority is the community's, and Rome has built a papacy on a grammatical accident of who happened to answer first at Caesarea Philippi. Some add 18:1 as evidence: if Peter had just been made supreme, why are the disciples still asking who is the greatest? On this reading the two chapters together teach a fellowship of equals holding shared authority, with no chair, no primacy, no pope. The argument does not depend on an invisible church; most of its proponents affirm visible congregations exercising real discipline, which makes the case stronger, not weaker. This argument is textual, not anti-Catholic spite, and it deserves its full weight.

6. Now press by putting the two texts side by side and listing exactly what each contains. What is in Matthew 16:17-19 that is absent from 18:18? Count the items. And does shared authority in 18 actually subtract anything from 16?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Put them in parallel and the asymmetry is immediate. Matthew 16 contains, addressed to Simon alone and in the singular: a beatitude naming him personally, a revelation from the Father, a new name, the rock declaration, the promise against the gates of Hades, and the keys of the kingdom, the Isaiah 22 steward's office. Matthew 18 contains one item: binding and loosing, in the plural. The shared formula is really shared, and the Catholic Church teaches exactly that (CCC 881): the authority to bind and loose belongs to the apostolic college. But the keys are never repeated, the rock is never repeated, the new name is never repeated. What Peter shares with the college is real; what he holds alone remains alone.

So the two chapters together teach neither a headless college nor a head without a body, but what the Church has always practiced: a college with a head. The steward of Isaiah 22 was one officer within a royal household full of officials; his key did not abolish their offices, and their offices did not duplicate his key. As for 18:1, the disciples asking who is greatest after Caesarea Philippi proves only what the Gospels show on every page: the apostles were slow students, still jockeying on the

road to the cross, which is precisely why the office was given by gift rather than earned by merit. The concession stands and should be made warmly: 18:18 really does mean the Church's authority is never one man's private possession. Catholic teaching does not merely survive that point; it asserts it.

Where Two or Three

7. Read Matthew 18:19-20, then 18:21-35. First, verse 20: what exactly does Jesus promise, and what does a promise like that require of the one making it? Then the parable: work out the arithmetic of the two debts, and name the exact moment the first servant's story turns. What does the last verse demand, and where have we prayed those terms before?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Verse 20 promises presence: where two or three gather in his name, there am I in the midst of them. A rabbi could say the divine presence rests where men sit over the words of Torah; Jesus says I am there, a promise no one can keep who is not God, and a bell our study has heard ringing since a name in chapter 1. Let it ring; it has one more note to sound before we finish.

The parable: ten thousand talents is an unpayable, national-treasury absurdity, and it is cancelled outright on a plea for patience. A hundred denarii is real money, about a hundred days' wages, and utterly trivial beside it. The story turns the moment the forgiven man walks out the door and finds someone who owes him: mercy received was never allowed to become mercy given. The demand of the last verse is forgiveness from your heart, and we have prayed these exact terms since Session 4: forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. The parable is that petition with a plot.

Send (12 minutes)

1. Jesus' process starts with "go to him alone." Whose sin against you have you told everyone except him? What would step one cost you, and what might it gain?
2. Run the arithmetic honestly: what has God written off for you, and what hundred denarii are you still holding in collections? What would releasing it from the heart require this week?

Live It This Week

- Name your ten thousand talents in prayer once this week: say out loud what God has actually forgiven you.
- Take one step of Matthew 18:15: one direct, private, gentle conversation you have been outsourcing to resentment.
- Before your group or family gathers this week, pray verse 20 and mean it: Lord, be in the midst of us.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, transfigured on the mountain, the Father told us to listen to you, and tonight you spoke of little ones, lost sheep, hard conversations, and debts we must release. We are gathered in your name;

keep your promise and stand in the midst of us. Make our parish a place the lost are sought and the forgiven forgive, and lead us down the mountain ready for the road ahead. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 18:20 (RSV2CE): *“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 9 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The Transfigured Christ and His Church · Matthew 17-18

Primary Text

• Matthew 17:1-8 · Matthew 17:24-27 · Matthew 18:1-6 · Matthew 18:10-14 · Matthew 18:15-20 · Matthew 18:21-35

Live Discovery Passages

• Exodus 24:15-18 and Exodus 34:29-35 (Sinai excavation, two groups) · Deuteronomy 18:15 (listen to him)

Background Passages

• Deuteronomy 19:15 (two or three witnesses) · Ezekiel 34:11-16 (the Lord shepherds) · Matthew 6:12 (as we forgive) · Matthew 16:17-19 side by side with 18:18 (for the steelman)

Catechism

• CCC 554-556 · CCC 1443-1445 · CCC 881 · CCC 2843

Memory Verse

• Matthew 18:20

The Road to Jerusalem

Matthew 19–20 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that on the road to Jerusalem, Jesus keeps raising every stake: marriage restored to “the beginning” and made indissoluble, celibacy embraced for the kingdom, riches unmasked as a rival god, the Father’s generosity offending human bookkeeping, and the destination named in his clearest words yet: the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Catholic Touchstone. The indissolubility of marriage, honestly engaging the exception clause; celibacy for the sake of the kingdom; the evangelical counsels in the rich young man; and the ransom saying as the Gospel’s own statement of redemption.

What You Need to Know

The divorce controversy (19:1–12) opens with a trap. The Pharisees ask whether divorce is lawful “for any cause,” placing Jesus between the rabbinic schools: Shammai allowed divorce only for serious sexual sin, Hillel for nearly anything, a spoiled dinner included. Jesus refuses the menu and appeals over Moses’ head to the beginning, quoting Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, which the group will find live: male and female, one flesh, joined by God. His conclusion legislates: what therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder. Pressed on Moses’ certificate of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1), Jesus reclassifies it: a concession for your hardness of heart, never the design. Then verse 9, with its famous exception clause, which is tonight’s steelman and must be handled with complete honesty; see the steelman notes. The disciples’ reaction in verse 10 is itself evidence: “if such is the case... it is not expedient to marry.” No one gasps at a position Shammai already held; they gasp because Jesus has closed the exit they assumed was there. Jesus answers their shock not by softening marriage but by unveiling a second vocation: some make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, consecrated celibacy, received not by all but by those to whom it is given. Two vocations, both demanding, both gifts.

The rich young man (19:16–30) asks the right question and goes away grieving from the right answer. He has kept the commandments; Jesus, loving him in Mark’s telling, raises the ceiling: “if you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” The Church has always heard here the invitation beyond precept to counsel, the road of poverty, chastity, and obedience freely embraced (CCC 2053), while the camel and the needle’s eye teach everyone that riches are a rival god whose grip only God can break: with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. Peter’s “we have left everything” receives a staggering answer: thrones for the Twelve judging the twelve tribes (the New Israel’s government, one more quiet apostolic-office stone), a hundredfold now, and eternal life, with the refrain that frames the next parable: many that are first will be last, and the last first.

The laborers in the vineyard (20:1–16) exists to offend our bookkeeping. Those hired at dawn agree to a denarius, the just daily wage; those hired at the eleventh hour work one hour and receive the same. No one is cheated; someone is scandalized. The householder's questions end argument: am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? Grace is not wages, God's arithmetic is mercy, and the deathbed convert and the lifelong disciple receive the same denarius, which is God himself. St.

Gregory the Great read the hours as the ages of a life and of history: whatever hour it is, the Master is still in the marketplace hiring.

The third passion prediction (20:17–19) is the most detailed yet: betrayal, condemnation, Gentiles, mocking, scourging, crucifixion, and on the third day rising. Straight into that solemnity walks the mother of the sons of Zebedee, asking thrones. Jesus' answer gives the session its summit: you do not know what you are asking; are you able to drink the cup? The cup, in the prophets, is the cup of God's wrath against sin (Isaiah 51:17); Jesus will pray about this cup in a garden soon. Greatness among the Gentiles is lordship; among you it must be service and slavery of love, “even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” This is the Gospel's own soteriology in one sentence, saturated with Isaiah 53's Servant who pours out his soul to death and bears the sin of many. The group discovers Isaiah 53:10–12 live and reads the ransom saying inside it.

The session, and the road, ends at Jericho, fifteen miles from Jerusalem: two blind men, the cry now familiar, “Have mercy on us, Son of David,” the crowd rebuking them, and the two crying out the more. Jesus stops, touches, heals; they follow him, up the Jericho road, toward the city. The Son of David list has one entry left to collect, and it is next week, at the gates.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Genesis 1:27 and 2:24.** Male and female, one flesh: the beginning to which Jesus appeals over Moses' concession, discovered live tonight.
- **Deuteronomy 24:1–4.** The certificate of divorce: Moses' concession for hardness of heart, never the design.
- **Isaiah 51:17.** The cup of the Lord's wrath: the cup Jesus asks the sons of Zebedee about, and will face in Gethsemane.
- **Isaiah 53:10–12.** The Servant who makes himself an offering for sin and bears the sin of many: the wellspring of “a ransom for many,” discovered live tonight.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (On Adulterous Marriages)

Augustine holds the line the Church has never surrendered: the bond of a consummated Christian marriage is dissolved by death alone. Separation from an unfaithful spouse may be permitted, but the bond endures, and neither party is free to marry another while the other lives; the Lord's appeal to the beginning admits no exception that ends a marriage God has joined.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

On the rich young man, Chrysostom notes that Jesus did not say riches are evil but that clinging is fatal: the young man's possessions possessed him. What Christ asks he asks as a physician prescribing freedom, and the grief with which the man departs is the tightening of the very chains he declined to drop.

Voices of the Church: St. Gregory the Great (Homilies on the Gospels)

Gregory reads the hours of the vineyard as the ages of a human life: some are called in childhood's morning, some at noon, some in the evening of old age. Let no one presume on a late call, and let no one despair of one: the householder is in the marketplace at the eleventh hour, and the denarius he pays is nothing less than himself.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1614–1615.** Jesus unequivocally taught the original meaning of the union of man and woman: what God has joined, man must not divide. This demand can seem impossible, but Jesus gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the kingdom; the grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross.
- **CCC 1618–1619.** Christ is the center of all Christian life, and some renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom: virginity for the kingdom is an unfolding of baptismal grace and a sign that the world is passing away.
- **CCC 2053.** The rich young man: keeping the commandments is answered by the call to more, “come, follow me,” and the evangelical counsels are inseparable from the commandments, the way of perfection freely embraced.
- **CCC 605.** Jesus affirms he came to give his life as a ransom for many: the Church, following the apostles, teaches that Christ died for all without exception; there is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer.

Thread Watch

- **Son of David thread (penultimate entry).** Jericho's two blind men, rebuked by the crowd, cry out the more. The list now runs: the blind, a Gentile mother, the desperate, never the experts. One entry remains, next week, at the gates of Jerusalem.
- **The cup (plant).** “Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” Isaiah's cup of wrath, accepted by the Servant. It returns in a garden in Session 13.
- **Ransom and Servant (develop).** Isaiah 53 has shadowed the healings since 8:17; at 20:28 it steps into Jesus' own mouth. The bread thread and the Servant thread are converging on the same night.

Session Goals

1. Participants discover Genesis 1–2 as Jesus' own ground for marriage and can explain “the beginning” against Moses' concession.

2. Participants hear the strongest Protestant reading of the exception clause and can answer it honestly, including what remains debated.
3. Participants can articulate celibacy for the kingdom and the evangelical counsels as gifts, not punishments.
4. Participants let the vineyard parable audit their own bookkeeping about grace.
5. Participants discover Isaiah 53 inside the ransom saying and can state the Gospel's own account of why Jesus goes to Jerusalem.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: compress the Jericho scene into the closing prayer's introduction (saves about 4 minutes), then drop the Dig Deeper on annulments and cover its distinction in one spoken sentence (saves about 5 minutes). Do not cut the Genesis discovery, the steelman chain, or the Isaiah 53 discovery.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 10 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Road to Jerusalem

Matthew 19–20 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you set your face toward Jerusalem and told your friends plainly what waited there, and still you walked. On the road tonight you will talk to us about the things we hold tightest: our loves, our money, our sense of what we are owed. Loosen our grip where it needs loosening, and give us the nerve to keep walking with you. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. What is the longest promise you have ever seen somebody keep, and what do you think kept it alive?
2. When has generosity toward someone else ever bothered you, a raise, a break, a pardon they “didn’t earn”? Be honest.

Build (55 minutes)

Back to the Beginning

1. Read Matthew 19:3–6. The Pharisees ask about lawful divorce “for any cause,” inviting Jesus to pick a rabbinic team. **Live discovery:** Jesus answers with two quotations; have two people find and read Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24. What does Jesus build from these verses, who does the joining in his conclusion, and what does “let not man put asunder” therefore forbid?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The rabbis debated the grounds for divorce; Jesus rejects the question’s premise and appeals behind Moses to the Creator’s design: male and female, a man leaves and cleaves, the two become one flesh. His conclusion adds the decisive word: what therefore GOD has joined together. Marriage is not a contract two parties write and may unwrite; it is a joining God himself performs, and once a Christian marriage is validly made and consummated, no human authority, spouse, rabbi, or state, has standing to sever it. When they cite Moses’ certificate, Jesus reclassifies the entire provision: a concession to hardness of heart, from the beginning it was not so.

Build Then Press: What About the Exception Clause?

2. Read Matthew 19:7–9 slowly, and then verse 10, the disciples’ reaction, before the steelman.

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

The Protestant case here is as textual as it gets: Jesus himself says “whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.” An exception clause is sitting in the verse. The natural reading, held by most Protestant churches, is that sexual infidelity genuinely dissolves the bond, freeing the innocent spouse to remarry. Matthew records the clause twice (5:32

and 19:9), so it is no scribal stray. On this reading, the Catholic Church's absolute indissolubility teaches more than her Master did, binding heavy burdens Christ himself loosened, at enormous pastoral cost to abandoned and betrayed spouses. This objection is serious, compassionate in motive, and standing on the very verse in front of us. Give it full weight.

3. Now press, starting from inside the passage. Read verse 10 again: the disciples respond that if this is the case, better not to marry at all. Here is the historical key: the school of Shammai ALREADY allowed divorce for adultery; that position was on the menu. If Jesus had just agreed with Shammai, what sense does their shock make? Then consider: the word translated “unchastity” is *porneia*, not the ordinary word for adultery (*moicheia*), which Jesus uses in the same sentence. And compare the parallel accounts: Mark 10:11–12, Luke 16:18, and St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10–11 all report the teaching with no exception at all.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The disciples' shock is the tell. Nobody says “better never to marry” about a position a major rabbinic school already held; they gasp because Jesus has taught something stricter than every school, closing the exit everyone assumed. Then the vocabulary: Jesus distinguishes *porneia* from adultery in the same breath, and many scholars, ancient and modern, understand the clause to address unions that were never lawful marriages at all, the incestuous unions of Leviticus 18, a sense many also find in *porneia* in the apostolic decree of Acts 15:20. Separating from such a union “divorces” no true marriage, because none existed. Others read the clause as permitting separation without remarriage, which the Church in fact allows in grave circumstances. Scholars genuinely debate the clause's precise force, and honesty requires saying so.

But notice what cannot be debated: Mark, Luke, and Paul, teaching the same doctrine to the wider Church, record no exception, and Paul attributes the no-remarriage rule to the Lord himself. An exception broad enough to dissolve real marriages would make the disciples' shock, and the celibacy teaching Jesus gives to answer it, unintelligible. The Church's reading holds the whole witness together: valid, consummated Christian marriage is dissolved by death alone; separation may be permitted; and an annulment is not a Catholic divorce but a finding that no valid bond existed from the start, the very situation the unlawful-unions reading of the exception clause has in view. Concede the pastoral weight without flinching: this teaching is heavy, the disciples said so first, and Jesus' answer was not “you exaggerate” but “not all can receive this, only those to whom it is given.” Indissolubility is not survivable by willpower; it is a grace of the sacrament, flowing, the Catechism says, from the cross.

Dig Deeper: Annulment Is Not Catholic Divorce

A divorce claims to end a marriage; a declaration of nullity finds that, despite appearances and good faith, some essential element (free consent, openness to children, capacity, form) was missing from the start, so no valid bond ever formed. The Church cannot dissolve a valid, ratified, and consummated Christian marriage; she can and must discern whether such a bond was ever formed. In certain limited cases she does dissolve other bonds, a marriage never consummated, or a natural marriage in favor of the faith, but a consummated sacramental marriage ends only in death. The

exception clause and the annulment process are, at bottom, about the same reality: unions that were never true marriages.

4. Read Matthew 19:10–12. The disciples say better not to marry; Jesus answers with a third way no one asked about. What is it, who receives it, and what is it for? What do verses 1–12 taken together say about vocations?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Some are incapable of marriage by birth or by men's violence, and some "have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven": freely chosen celibacy as total availability for God, received not by all but by those to whom it is given. Jesus does not soften marriage to make it easier; he unveils a second demanding gift beside it. Two vocations, both callings, both graces: lifelong covenant love that images the beginning, and consecrated celibacy that images the end, when they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Every celibate priest, every religious sister and brother, stands inside this verse.

The Man Who Owned Too Much

5. Read Matthew 19:16–26. The young man has kept the commandments; what does Jesus offer him next, and with what two-word invitation does it end? Why does he leave grieving? And when the disciples ask who then can be saved, what is Jesus' answer, word for word?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

"If you would be perfect": sell, give to the poor, treasure in heaven, "and come, follow me." Beyond the commandments lies not a rule but a Person and an invitation, the way of the counsels the Church's religious life has walked ever since. He leaves grieving because his great possessions possess him; St. John Chrysostom says the grief is the sound of chains tightening. The camel and the needle teach the hard universal: riches are a rival god no one dethrones alone. Who then can be saved? "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Salvation is not the strong succeeding; it is the impossible being done by God, in rich men and poor.

6. Read Matthew 20:1–16. Do the payroll math: who worked how long, who received what, and was anyone cheated? What are the householder's two closing questions, and which of the two men in you do they interrogate: the dawn worker or the eleventh-hour man?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Twelve hours, nine, six, three, one: every man receives the same denarius, the agreed just wage. No one is defrauded; the dawn workers receive exactly their contract, and their grievance is pure comparison: "you have made them equal to us." The householder's questions close the case: am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? Grace is not wages; God's arithmetic is mercy, and the denarius, St. Gregory says, is God himself, whom the deathbed convert and the lifelong saint receive whole and entire. The parable means to catch us grumbling, and usually does.

The Cup and the Ransom

7. Read Matthew 20:17–28. Against the most detailed passion prediction yet, what do James, John, and their mother request? What does Jesus ask them about a cup (see Isaiah 51:17 for what “the cup” means in the prophets)? **Live discovery:** then his climactic sentence, verse 28, has a source; have someone find Isaiah 53:10–12 and read it. What does the Servant do there, for whom, and what words does verse 28 draw straight from it?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Against betrayal, condemnation, mocking, scourging, and cross, they ask for thrones. Jesus' question, can you drink the cup, reaches into the prophets, where the cup is the cup of the Lord's wrath against sin; he will hold that cup in a garden very soon, and yes, they will share it, James in his martyrdom under Herod (Acts 12:2) and John in a long life of persecution and exile, though not by their own strength. Greatness among his people is inverted: whoever would be great must be servant, whoever would be first, slave.

Then the sentence the whole road has been building toward: the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Isaiah 53 stands open behind every word: the Servant who makes himself an offering for sin, pours out his soul to death, and bears the sin of many. Jesus is announcing, in the Servant's own vocabulary, why Jerusalem: his death will be the price of release, the offering that sets the many free. The Church teaches with the apostles that “many” excludes no one: there is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer (CCC 605).

Send (12 minutes)

1. Married, discerning, or single: what would it mean this week to treat your state of life as a vocation Jesus gives rather than a status you manage?
2. The young man was one possession away from following. Name yours, honestly, in the silence of your heart. What is one step toward an open hand?

Live It This Week

- If you are married, pray this week for your spouse by name and for one married couple under strain; if you are single, pray for the grace to hear your vocation as a call, not a verdict.
- Give something away this week that costs you: money, time, or the eleventh-hour grudge you have kept against someone God treated generously.
- Read Matthew 21–23 before next session. And keep the Son of David list handy: it completes at the gates.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, Servant and Ransom, on the road you healed two blind men who would not stop shouting your royal name, and they followed you up the hill toward Jerusalem. Give us their stubborn voices and

their following feet. Loosen what we clutch, teach us the greatness of serving, and when you pass by this week, let us not miss you. Son of David, have mercy on us. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 20:28 (RSV2CE): *“...even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 10 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The Road to Jerusalem · Matthew 19–20

Primary Text

• Matthew 19:3–6 · Matthew 19:7–10 · Matthew 19:10–12 · Matthew 19:16–26 · Matthew 20:1–16 · Matthew 20:17–28 · Matthew 20:29–34

Live Discovery Passages

• Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 (the beginning) · Isaiah 53:10–12 (the ransom for many)

Background Passages

• Deuteronomy 24:1–4 (the certificate) · Matthew 5:32 (the clause's first appearance) · Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:10–11 (no exception in the parallels) · Leviticus 18 and Acts 15:20 (porneia as unlawful unions) · Isaiah 51:17 (the cup)

Catechism

• CCC 1614–1615 · CCC 1618–1619 · CCC 2053 · CCC 605

Memory Verse

• Matthew 20:28

The Son of David in His Temple

Matthew 21–23 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the Son of David thread completing at the gates: the King arrives as Zechariah promised, the crowds and then the children cry the royal title in the temple itself, and Jesus caps the thread with his own riddle from Psalm 110, David's son who is David's Lord. They watch the confrontation parables strip the temple establishment bare, hear the greatest commandment, and sit with the woes of chapter 23, including the verse Protestants quote most often against Catholic priests.

Catholic Touchstone. Moses' seat and the authority of office despite unworthy officeholders; an honest, textual answer to "call no man your father"; and the dark Emmanuel note of a forsaken house, which sets up the Gospel's final promise.

What You Need to Know

The entry (21:1–11) is staged prophecy. Jesus, who has silenced messianic acclamation for ten chapters, now deliberately arranges its fulfillment, sending for the donkey so that Zechariah 9:9 happens in public view: your king comes to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey. The crowds answer with Psalm 118, the pilgrim psalm: Hosanna (save us, we pray) to the Son of David. The royal title our study has tracked since two blind men in chapter 9 is now on every tongue, and when the temple authorities hear even the children crying it in the temple courts (21:15), they are indignant; Jesus answers them from Psalm 8 as Matthew 21:16 quotes it in its Greek form: out of the mouths of infants you have brought perfect praise. (RSV2CE Psalm 8:2, following the Hebrew, reads that God has founded a bulwark from the mouths of babes; Matthew follows the Septuagint's perfect praise.) Note who has confessed the Son of David across this Gospel: the blind, a Canaanite mother, the Jericho beggars, pilgrim crowds, children. Never once the experts. The thread's completion is also its verdict.

The temple cleansing splices two prophets: my house shall be called a house of prayer (Isaiah 56:7, a text about the nations being gathered in) but you make it a den of robbers (Jeremiah 7:11, from the sermon in which Jeremiah warned that God would do to the temple what he did to Shiloh). The splice is itself the message: the temple has failed its purpose toward the nations, and judgment is in the doorway. The withered fig tree, leaves without fruit, is the same sermon in a sign.

The confrontation parables escalate. The two sons: saying yes and not going against saying no and repenting, with tax collectors and harlots entering first. The wicked tenants is built on Isaiah 5's vineyard song, which the group will discover live: Israel's prophets beaten, the Son cast out of the vineyard and killed, and the owner's verdict. Jesus seals it with Psalm 118 again: the stone the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; the builders themselves are rejecting it in real time, and Matthew notes they perceived he was speaking about them. The wedding feast adds the unsettling coda of the man without a garment: invitation is wide, presumption is fatal.

The test questions follow: Caesar's coin (render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's, and the human person, stamped with God's image, belongs to God); the Sadducees' resurrection riddle (you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God: he is not God of the dead but of the living); and the greatest commandment, where Jesus welds Deuteronomy 6:5 to Leviticus 19:18 and hangs the whole Law and Prophets on the double love. Then Jesus asks his own question, the session's theological summit: whose son is the Christ? They say David's. He answers from Psalm 110, which the group discovers live: David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord. How is David's son David's Lord? No one could answer him a word. The genealogy of chapter 1 was true and insufficient: the Son of David is also the Lord seated at God's right hand, and only the Incarnation holds both. Our thread does not merely complete; it detonates upward.

Chapter 23 requires a steady hand. Begin with verses 2–3, which cut in a direction that surprises everyone: the scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do. Jesus affirms the teaching authority of an office while condemning the officeholders' example, which is precisely the distinction the Church has needed in every century since, and the reader of Session 8 will recognize it. The woes then fall on display religion: phylacteries broadened, places of honor loved, titles savored. Verse 9, call no man your father on earth, sits inside that context and is tonight's steelman; handle it with the same textual honesty as always. The chapter ends in tears, not thunder: how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood, and you would not. Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. The One greater than the temple (12:6) is withdrawing from it, and the word "forsaken" tolls the Emmanuel thread's darkest note. Tell the group only this: the Gospel is not finished with the theme of presence. Two words in verse 39 leave the door open: "until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Zechariah 9:9.** Your king comes, humble and mounted on a donkey: staged and fulfilled at the gates, discovered live tonight.
- **Psalm 118:22–26.** Hosanna, the blessed coming one, and the rejected stone made head of the corner: the entry's soundtrack and the tenants' verdict.
- **Isaiah 5:1–7.** The vineyard song behind the wicked tenants, discovered live: the vineyard is the house of Israel, and the owner looked for fruit.
- **Isaiah 56:7 with Jeremiah 7:11.** House of prayer for all peoples; den of robbers: the cleansing's spliced sermon.
- **Psalm 110:1.** The LORD says to my lord: sit at my right hand. David's son and David's Lord, discovered live at the session's summit.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Andrew of Crete (Oration for Palm Sunday)

Andrew bids the Church spread before Christ not garments and branches but ourselves: let us lay down our own selves like cloaks before his feet, that the One who rode on humble beasts may ride into our souls. The entry into Jerusalem seeks a second entry, into us.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Expositions on the Psalms)

On Psalm 110, Augustine hears the whole mystery in one verse: as man, Christ is David's son; as God, David's Lord. The Jews of that day could not answer because they would not confess both natures; the Church answers daily, for she knows the One seated at the right hand is the same who took flesh from David's line.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

On the woes, Chrysostom warns that Christ's severest words fall not on ignorance but on display: religion performed for the eyes of men. The disease is not the seat of Moses but the love of the seat; not the title but the appetite for it.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 559–560.** Jesus' entry into Jerusalem manifests the coming of the kingdom that the Messiah-King, welcomed by children and the humble of heart, is going to accomplish by the Passover of his death and resurrection.
- **CCC 583–586.** Jesus honored the temple and loved it as his Father's house, yet identified himself as God's definitive dwelling among men; his prophetic act and words announce the temple's destruction and point to his own body as the definitive dwelling of God among men, which the temple prefigured.
- **CCC 439.** Many recognized in Jesus the fundamental features of the messianic Son of David; he accepted the title, though with reserve, because contemporaries understood it too politically. For the title's true height, see CCC 447: in disputing with the Pharisees over the meaning of Psalm 110, Jesus hints at the divine sense of the title Lord.

Thread Watch

- **Son of David thread (COMPLETE).** Blind men, a Canaanite mother, Jericho beggars, pilgrim crowds, children in the temple, and never the experts. Then Jesus lifts the title past politics with Psalm 110: David's son and David's Lord. Read the list back to the group and let them draw the verdict about who sees.
- **Emmanuel thread (darkest note).** "Your house is forsaken." The presence greater than the temple is withdrawing from it. Do not resolve; point only to the "until" of 23:39 and say the Gospel has two more moves to make.
- **Office and officeholder (develop).** Moses' seat: authority of office affirmed while officeholders are condemned. Connect back to rock and stumbling stone in Session 8 if the group does not connect it first.

Session Goals

1. Participants discover Zechariah 9:9 and Psalm 118 inside the entry and complete the Son of David list with its verdict.
2. Participants can explain the temple cleansing's spliced prophecy and the tenants parable's Isaiah 5 foundation.
3. Participants wrestle with Psalm 110 and can state why only the Incarnation answers Jesus' riddle.

4. Participants can explain Moses' seat as authority of office despite unworthy men, and connect it to Session 8.

5. Participants hear the strongest Protestant reading of “call no man father” and can answer it from Scripture's own usage.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: compress the wedding feast into one sentence within Build question 3's answer (saves about 5 minutes), then drop the Dig Deeper on Caesar's coin (saves about 4 minutes). Do not cut the Psalm 110 discovery or the steelman chain.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 11 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Son of David in His Temple

Matthew 21–23 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Hosanna, Lord: save us, we pray. You came to your city humble and mounted on a donkey, and the children knew you when the experts did not. Give us tonight the eyes of the small and the honesty to hear even your hardest words. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Describe a time you watched an expert miss something a child or a beginner saw immediately. Why does that happen?
2. What is the difference between respecting an office and admiring the person in it? Have you ever had to do one without the other?

Build (55 minutes)

The King at the Gates

1. Read Matthew 21:1–11 and 21:14–16. Jesus, who has hushed messianic talk for chapters, now stages a public sign. **Live discovery:** have someone find Zechariah 9:9 and read it with verse 10. What kind of king does Zechariah promise, and what does the donkey say that a warhorse would not? Then complete our list: who cries “Son of David” here, who objects, and how does Jesus defend the criers?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Zechariah's king is righteous, saving, and humble, riding a donkey while chariots and warhorses are cut off: a king of peace whose dominion reaches the ends of the earth. Jesus arranges the fulfillment deliberately; after ten chapters of reserve, he is announcing himself, on his own terms. The crowds cry Psalm 118's Hosanna to the Son of David, and in the temple the children take up the cry while the chief priests seethe. Jesus answers from Psalm 8 as Matthew 21:16 quotes it from the Greek: out of the mouths of infants, perfect praise. Read the full list back: two blind men, a Canaanite mother, two Jericho beggars, pilgrim crowds, children. Never once a scribe. In this Gospel, the royal title is confessed by exactly the people the experts overlook, which is itself the Gospel's verdict on expertise without humility.

2. Read Matthew 21:12–13. Jesus splices two prophets in one sentence. Isaiah 56:7 promised the temple as a house of prayer, and for whom? Jeremiah 7:11 called it a den of robbers, in a sermon threatening what? What is the splice saying, and what does the fig tree (21:18–19) add?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Isaiah's house of prayer is “for all peoples”: the temple existed to gather the nations to God. Jeremiah's den-of-robbers sermon warned that God would do to the temple what he did to Shiloh:

destroy it. The splice indicts and sentences in one breath: the temple has failed its mission to the nations, sheltering commerce and presumption instead, and judgment stands in the doorway. The fig tree, all leaves and no fruit, withered at a word, is the same sermon as a sign. Remember who said, in chapter 12, that something greater than the temple is here.

The Vineyard and the Stone

3. Read Matthew 21:33–46. **Live discovery:** Jesus is renovating an old song; have someone find Isaiah 5:1–7 and read it. In Isaiah, who is the vineyard and what did the owner seek? In Jesus' version, who are the servants, who is the son, and what is chilling about where the story was pointed all along? What does the Psalm 118 stone add?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Isaiah's vineyard is the house of Israel; the owner looked for justice and found bloodshed. Jesus keeps the vineyard and changes the villains: not the vines but the tenants, the leaders entrusted with God's people. The servants are the prophets, beaten and killed in waves; the son is sent last, "they will respect my son," and they cast him out of the vineyard and kill him: Jesus is narrating his own death to the men planning it, days in advance. The stone the builders rejected becoming the cornerstone (Psalm 118) turns the murder inside out: the rejection itself becomes the foundation. Matthew notes they perceived he was speaking about them, and feared the crowds. The parable was a mirror, and they saw.

David's Son, David's Lord

4. Read Matthew 22:34–40, then 22:41–46. First the greatest commandment: what two texts does Jesus weld together, and what hangs on them? Then Jesus finally asks his own question. **Live discovery:** have someone find Psalm 110:1 and read it slowly, noticing who speaks to whom. What is Jesus' riddle, why could no one answer a word, and what is the only answer that works?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He joins Deuteronomy 6:5, love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind, to Leviticus 19:18, love your neighbor as yourself, and hangs all the Law and the Prophets on the pair: everything this Gospel has taught, from the antitheses to the woes, is commentary on the double love.

Then the riddle. In Psalm 110, David himself, speaking in the Spirit, says: the LORD (God) says to my lord (the Messiah), sit at my right hand. Fathers do not call their sons "my lord"; ancestors do not defer to descendants. If the Christ is merely David's son, David cannot call him Lord; if merely David's Lord, the genealogy and the promises fail. The only answer is the one this whole Gospel has been assembling: the Christ is David's son according to the flesh, born of the line traced in chapter 1, and David's Lord according to his divinity, the Son whom the Father seats at his right hand. Our Son of David thread does not simply complete tonight; it detonates upward. No one could answer him a word, and no one dared ask him anything more.

Moses' Seat and the Woes

5. Read Matthew 23:1–12. Verses 2–3 surprise almost everyone: what does Jesus affirm, and what does he condemn, in the same breath? Where has this study met that distinction before? Then verses 5–7: what exactly is the disease Jesus diagnoses?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He affirms the office: the scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you. He condemns the men: do not do what they do, for they preach but do not practice. Authority of office despite unworthy officeholders: we met exactly this in Session 8, where the rock received the keys and was called Satan five verses apart. The diagnosed disease is display: religion performed for the eyes of men, honored seats, broad phylacteries, loved titles. The greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled.

Build Then Press: “Call No Man Your Father”

6. Read Matthew 23:8–12 exactly as written before the steelman.

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

The verse could hardly be plainer, the objection runs: “call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.” Yet Catholics address every priest as Father, the pope as Holy Father, and abbots by a title that literally means father. This is not a strained inference; it is apparently direct disobedience to a recorded command of Christ, in a passage condemning exactly the religious title-love the Catholic clergy seems to institutionalize. Many sincere Protestants find this the single clearest case of the Church contradicting her Master. Let it stand at full strength.

7. Now press, first on the verse's own context, then on Scripture's practice. Verses 8 and 10 forbid two more titles alongside father: what are they, and does anyone, Protestant or Catholic, avoid the words teacher, doctor, or even dad? Then the apostles themselves: **Live discovery:** have someone read 1 Corinthians 4:14–15, and another Acts 7:2 and 1 John 2:13–14. How do Stephen, Paul, and John use the word?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The same paragraph forbids “rabbi” (teacher) and “master/instructor,” yet every Christian tradition uses teacher, doctor (which means teacher), professor, and of course father for the man who raised them. A woodenly literal reading proves far too much, and no one, in any church, actually lives it. The context supplies the real target: verses 5–7, religion performed for honor, seats loved, salutations savored, titles as trophies. Jesus is forbidding the appetite, and the pretension that any man is the source of what only God gives.

Scripture's own authors read him exactly that way. Stephen opens his speech, “brethren and fathers.” John writes, “I am writing to you, fathers.” Elisha cries “my father, my father” after Elijah. Above all Paul: “I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel,” and he calls Timothy his true child in the faith. So in the same generation that received Matthew 23, Christians freely addressed men as fathers, and Paul claimed spiritual fatherhood outright, because derived, instrumental fatherhood honors rather than rivals the Father from whom, as Ephesians 3:14–15

says, every family in heaven and on earth is named. Calling a priest “Father” confesses that he begot us in the Gospel and feeds us as a father does, all on behalf of the one Father. Concede the warning’s bite without wriggling: clergy who love the title, the seat, and the salutation are the verse’s actual targets, and the vices that make up clericalism, the loved seat, the broadened phylactery, the savored title, are condemned here one by one. The Church’s answer to Matthew 23:9 is not to rename her priests; it is to demand they be the servants verse 11 requires.

8. Read Matthew 23:37–39, the chapter’s true ending. What image does Jesus reach for, and what emotion carries it? What does “your house is forsaken” mean from the mouth of the One greater than the temple? And what small word in verse 39 keeps the ending from being final?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Not thunder but tears: a hen gathering her brood under her wings, and you would not. “Your house is forsaken and desolate” from him means the Presence is withdrawing from the temple, the darkest note our Emmanuel thread has sounded. But the last word is “until”: you will not see me again UNTIL you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. The door closes without locking. Hold this ache; the Gospel has two moves left, and the theme of presence is not finished.

Send (12 minutes)

1. The Son of David was recognized by the blind, the foreign, the desperate, and the small. What in you belongs to the experts’ seats, and what still belongs to the children?
2. Everything hangs on the double love. Which half is currently weaker in you, and what one act this week would strengthen it?

Live It This Week

- Pray Psalm 110 once this week and let its first verse carry the weight it carried in the temple courts.
- Perform one act of hidden honor: give away a seat, a credit, a salutation you could have kept.
- Pray for your priests by name, that they be the fathers verse 11 demands: the servants of all.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, Son of David and David’s Lord, you wept over the city that would not be gathered. Gather us. Purge from us the love of seats and titles, teach us the double love on which everything hangs, and keep us among the children who know your name. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 22:37 (RSV2CE): *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*

EMMANUEL • SESSION 11 • LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The Son of David in His Temple · Matthew 21–23

Primary Text

• Matthew 21:1–11, 14–16 · Matthew 21:12–13, 18–19 · Matthew 21:33–46 · Matthew 22:34–40 · Matthew 22:41–46 · Matthew 23:1–12 · Matthew 23:37–39

Live Discovery Passages

• Zechariah 9:9–10 (the humble king) · Isaiah 5:1–7 (the vineyard song) · Psalm 110:1 (David's Lord) · 1 Corinthians 4:14–15; Acts 7:2; 1 John 2:13–14 (spiritual fatherhood)

Background Passages

• Psalm 118:22–26 (Hosanna; the stone) · Psalm 8:2 (out of the mouths of infants) · Isaiah 56:7 with Jeremiah 7:1–15 (the splicer) · Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 (the double love) · 2 Kings 2:12 (my father, my father) · Ephesians 3:14–15 (every family named)

Catechism

• CCC 559–560 · CCC 583–586 · CCC 439 · CCC 447

Memory Verse

• Matthew 22:37

Watch, Therefore

Matthew 24–25 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the fifth and final discourse: Jesus' prophecy of the temple's destruction, fulfilled within a generation, woven together with the promise of his coming at the close of the age, for which no one knows the day or hour. They discover Daniel 7 as the source of Jesus' favorite self-title, and they arrive at the Gospel's judgment scene, where the King is found hidden in the hungry, the stranger, and the prisoner, and the doing-the-word thread planted in Session 4 resolves in full.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church's teaching on the Last Judgment and the works of mercy, an honest engagement with the claim that judgment by works contradicts salvation by grace, and pastoral clarity on “this generation” and “no one knows the hour.”

What You Need to Know

The discourse opens with the disciples admiring the temple buildings and Jesus' devastating reply: there will not be left here one stone upon another. Herod's temple was among the wonders of the ancient world, its stones massive beyond belief, and in the year 70, within the lifetime of many listening, Roman legions under Titus burned and dismantled it. The disciples' double question in 24:3, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age, sets the discourse's famous interpretive challenge: the prophecy of the temple's end and the teaching on the world's end are woven together, and the Church has long read the chapter with what might be called prophetic bifocals. The near event, Jerusalem's fall, is described with sharp local detail: let those in Judea flee to the mountains, pray it be not in winter or on a sabbath, and “this generation will not pass away till all these things take place,” and within that generation Jerusalem fell. The far event, the coming of the Son of man, is described in cosmic terms and explicitly unscheduled: of that day and hour no one knows, not the angels, nor the Son, but the Father only. The Church has explained the Son's mysterious saying in more than one way (CCC 473–474 treat Christ's human knowledge); what the text fixes beyond dispute is that the hour is not revealed to us. Read this way, the chapter contains no failed prediction: what Jesus tied to that generation, the temple's fall, came true within it, and what he did not date was expressly declared unknowable. The Dig Deeper box equips leaders for the skeptical objection directly.

The group's Session 6 seed pays off tonight: the sign of Jonah was a promissory note, and Daniel 7 is the vault it draws on. Have the group discover Daniel 7:13–14 live: one like a son of man comes with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days and receives dominion, glory, and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him, an everlasting dominion. This is the source of Jesus' favorite self-designation, and it explains why “Son of man,” whatever its shading elsewhere, carries here an enthronement claim: the figure in Daniel comes on clouds TO God's throne and receives universal kingship. When Jesus says they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and

great glory, first-century ears hear Daniel's investiture. File the passage carefully: it returns at the trial next week, and its fulfillment is announced in the Gospel's final paragraph.

The watchfulness parables translate eschatology into ethics. The faithful and wise servant: blessed is the one whom the master, when he comes, finds so doing. The ten virgins: the oil that cannot be borrowed at midnight, which St. Augustine read as the interior life no one can lend you, readiness as a state of soul rather than a stockpile. The talents: the master's property entrusted according to ability, the wicked and slothful servant undone not by embezzlement but by burial, and the terrible economy of grace: to everyone who has, more will be given. The common thread: the interval before the Master's return is not a waiting room but a stewardship, and delay is the test of love.

Then the judgment of the nations (25:31–46), the summit of the discourse and one of the summits of the Gospel. The Son of man comes in his glory, sits on his glorious throne (Daniel 7 arriving), and separates people as a shepherd separates sheep from goats (Ezekiel 34's shepherd-judge). The criterion stuns everyone in the scene: I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to me. Six of the Church's seven corporal works of mercy come straight off this list; tradition adds the seventh, burying the dead (CCC 2447). Two details demand attention. First, the identification: as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. The Emmanuel thread sounds one of its deepest notes here: the presence of God-with-us is hidden in the least, and the poor are a sacrament of encounter with Christ whether or not the giver recognizes him. Second, both sheep and goats are surprised: Lord, when did we see you? Nobody in the scene was keeping a ledger; the sheep loved without calculating, which forecloses any reading of the scene as self-salvation by tallied merits. Tonight's steelman lives exactly here, and it should be handled with the study's usual honesty: the Protestant concern guards something true, and the text still says what it says.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Daniel 7:13–14.** One like a son of man receives everlasting dominion from the Ancient of Days: the source of Jesus' favorite title, discovered live tonight, and the key to the trial scene next week.
- **Ezekiel 34:17–24.** The Lord judges between sheep and sheep: the shepherd-judge of the judgment scene, and the same chapter that promised the Lord himself would come seeking the lost (Session 9).
- **Daniel 12:1–3.** The resurrection to everlasting life or shame: background of the discourse's two destinies.
- **Isaiah 58:6–10.** Share your bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into your house: the works of mercy were always God's chosen fast.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

Preaching on the judgment scene, Chrysostom refuses to let his congregation honor Christ in church and ignore him at the door: do not adorn the altar with silks, he says, while Christ shivers naked outside in the cold. The same Lord who said “this is my body” said “you did it to me”; the sacrament of the altar and the sacrament of the brother are honored, or dishonored, together.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Sermons on the Gospels)

On the ten virgins, Augustine observes that the oil could not be borrowed because it stands for what is inward: no one can lend you their conscience, their charity, their readiness. All ten slept, the wise and foolish alike, for death comes to all; the difference was not wakefulness but what each had become before the cry at midnight.

Voices of the Church: St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Catechetical Lecture 15)

Cyril teaches the two comings together: the first in humility, wrapped in swaddling clothes; the second in glory, robed in light, attended by angels. We preach not one coming only, he says, but a second far more splendid. And the Church draws the lesson: the same Lord who was judged will come as Judge, and the time between his comings is given for repentance and mercy.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 671–673.** Christ already reigns through the Church, yet all things are not yet subjected to him; the Church prays and works for the kingdom's full arrival, and since the Ascension, Christ's coming in glory has been imminent in the sense that it could break in at any moment, though its hour is known to the Father alone.
- **CCC 1038–1041.** The Last Judgment: in the presence of Christ, who is Truth itself, the truth of each person's relationship with God will be laid bare, and the Judge's word on our lives will be his word about our treatment of the least. The message calls to conversion while God still gives the acceptable time.
- **CCC 2447.** The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities: feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, burying the dead. Giving alms to the poor is among the chief witnesses to fraternal charity.

Thread Watch

- **Doing-the-word thread (RESOLVE).** Planted in Session 4 at the Sermon's ending (hearing and doing; "Lord, Lord"), it resolves here: the judgment scene is 7:21–27 with a throne. If a participant makes the connection unprompted, the thread has done its work.
- **Emmanuel thread (deepest hidden note).** "You did it to me": the Presence is hidden in the least. From temple to table to the poor: track where the group has now found God-with-us. One note remains.
- **Son of man / Daniel 7 (arm the trial).** The group discovers Daniel 7 tonight. Next week Jesus quotes it under oath at his trial, and the study's final session announces its fulfillment. Do not preview; just make sure tonight's discovery lands.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain the prophetic bifocals of the discourse: the temple's fall dated and fulfilled, the Second Coming real and undated.
2. Participants discover Daniel 7:13–14 and can explain why Son of man is an enthronement claim.

3. Participants can walk through the three watchfulness parables and state their shared demand.
4. Participants hear the strongest Protestant objection to judgment by works and can answer it from the text, with the honest concessions the sheep's surprise requires.
5. Participants each choose one concrete work of mercy for the coming week.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: treat the faithful servant and the talents together in one question and keep the ten virgins (saves about

6 minutes), then drop the Dig Deeper on “this generation” and cover it in two spoken sentences (saves about 4 minutes). Do not cut the Daniel 7 discovery or the judgment scene sequence.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 12 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Watch, Therefore

Matthew 24–25 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, Son of man, you told us plainly that you will come in glory, and just as plainly that we will not know the hour. Wake what sleeps in us tonight. Fill our lamps, put our talents to work, and teach us to find you where you promised to wait for us: in the hungry, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. What is something you put off because there seemed to be plenty of time, until suddenly there wasn't?
2. Have you ever discovered, after the fact, that someone you helped or brushed off was far more important than you knew? What did it teach you?

Build (55 minutes)

Not One Stone

1. Read Matthew 24:1–3. What do the disciples admire, what does Jesus predict, and what two questions do they ask in verse 3? Then read 24:15–22 and 24:34, and separately 24:36. Notice the difference in texture: which prediction comes with local, datable detail, and which comes with an explicit refusal of any date? What happened in the year 70?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

They admire the temple buildings, among the wonders of the world; Jesus predicts total demolition, not one stone on another. Their double question, when will this be, and what of your coming and the close of the age, gets a woven double answer. The temple's fall is described with fleeing-to-the-mountains, pray-not-in-winter detail and a deadline: this generation will not pass away, and in the year 70, within that generation, Titus' legions burned and dismantled the temple to the ground. The coming of the Son of man is painted in cosmic colors and expressly undated: of that day and hour no one knows, not the angels, nor the Son, but the Father only. What Jesus tied to that generation came true within it; what he did not date he declared unknowable. Anyone selling you a date is contradicting the discourse itself.

Dig Deeper: Did Jesus Get the Timing Wrong?

Skeptics point to “this generation will not pass away” as a failed end-of-the-world prediction. A longstanding Catholic reading answers from the discourse's own structure: “all these things” of verse 34 looks first to the disciples' first question, the temple's destruction, which came true within that generation in the year 70. Catholic interpreters divide the discourse in different ways, and Matthew deliberately weaves the near and far events together; but on any faithful reading, the

close of the age answers the disciples' second question, and for it Jesus refuses a date in the very next breath. A prophet who wrongly scheduled the end would not, two verses later, insist that no one knows the schedule, a refusal he applies even to himself. Jerusalem's fall is itself a type and pledge of the final judgment, which is why the two are woven: the near fulfillment guarantees the far one.

The Son of Man on the Clouds

2. Live discovery. Jesus has called himself “Son of man” throughout this Gospel, and at 24:30 he promises they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds with power and great glory. The phrase has an address. Have someone find Daniel 7:13–14 and read it slowly. In Daniel's vision, where is the one like a son of man going, what is he given, from whom, and for how long? So what kind of title has “Son of man” been all along?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

In Daniel, one like a son of man comes WITH the clouds of heaven TO the Ancient of Days, and is given dominion, glory, and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away. The movement is an enthronement: he comes on clouds to God's own throne and receives universal, permanent kingship. “Son of man” is not the modesty title it sounds like. Its shading varies from saying to saying, but in Daniel's light, and above all here and at the trial, it carries an enthronement claim, hiding in plain sight for twenty-four chapters. Keep Daniel 7 open in your memory: you will hear Jesus quote it under oath next week, at the moment it costs him his life, and you will hear its fulfillment announced in this Gospel's final paragraph.

The Interval Is the Test

3. Read the ten virgins (25:1–13) and the talents (25:14–30). In the first: what could not be borrowed at midnight, and why is that the point? In the second: what exactly is the third servant's sin, since he stole nothing? What do the parables agree the waiting time is for?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

All ten virgins sleep, wise and foolish alike; the difference at the cry is oil, which St. Augustine read as the inward life: conscience, charity, readiness of soul, the one thing no one can lend you when the Bridegroom comes. The third servant's sin is burial: not theft but sloth, a servant who so mistrusted his master's goodness that he did nothing at all. The interval before the Master's return is not a waiting room but a stewardship: watch, therefore, means become someone, and put what you were given to work, because delay is the test of love. Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.

The King in Disguise

4. Read Matthew 25:31–46 aloud, unhurried; it deserves it. Where does the throne scene's imagery come from, given tonight's Daniel discovery and Ezekiel 34's shepherd? List the six works named. What is the

criterion of this judgment, and what single sentence explains it? And notice carefully: what do BOTH the sheep and the goats say?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Daniel's enthroned Son of man now sits on his glorious throne, and Ezekiel's shepherd-judge separates the flock. The six works: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick, come to the prisoner, six of the Church's seven corporal works of mercy, read straight off this list; the seventh, burying the dead, comes from tradition. The criterion is mercy shown or refused, and the sentence that explains everything: as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. The King has been hidden in the least all along; the poor are a meeting place with Christ whether or not anyone recognizes him. Hear the Emmanuel bell: God-with-us, found now not in temple or cloud but in the hungry man on your street.

And both groups are astonished: Lord, when did we see you? The sheep were not collecting receipts; they loved without calculating, and met Christ without knowing it. The goats' defense, when did we see you and not serve you, is the Sermon's "Lord, Lord" of Session 4 come back with a throne behind it: the thread we planted at the Sermon's ending resolves here. Hearing without doing built on sand; here is the weather.

Build Then Press: Judged by Works, Saved by Grace?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

Here is the objection at full strength, and it guards the Reformation's central conviction: Scripture teaches that we are saved by grace through faith, not because of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8–9). If Matthew 25 taught that feeding the hungry earns heaven, it would contradict the Gospel itself and make Christ's cross unnecessary. Therefore, the Protestant reading runs, the judgment scene describes the EVIDENCE examined at judgment, not the GROUNDS of salvation: works are the fruit that proves faith was living, and the sheep are saved by faith, then identified by works. Any Catholic reading that turns the scene into a merit ledger is exactly the error Paul fought. This objection is powerful, biblically serious, and protects a truth no Christian may surrender: salvation is grace from first to last.

5. Now press, gently, because this steelman deserves both honesty about the text and honesty about what Catholics actually believe. Read verse 34 and verse 41 again: what word connects the verdict to the works ("inherit the kingdom... FOR I was hungry")? Recall Matthew's pattern: 7:21–27 and 16:27 ("he will repay every man for what he has done"). Then ask: does the Catholic reading actually say anyone EARNs heaven unaided? What do the sheep's surprise and the word "inherit" each contribute?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Take the text as it stands: the verdict is grounded, not merely evidenced, in the works: "inherit the kingdom prepared for you... FOR I was hungry and you gave me food." Matthew has said it consistently: not everyone who says Lord, Lord, but he who does the will of my Father; the Son of man will repay every man for what he has done. A reading that reduces the works to courtroom

exhibits has to read against the grain of the sentence and of the whole Gospel.

But now say what the Catholic Church actually teaches, because the objection is often aimed at a position no Catholic holds. Notice “inherit”: the kingdom is an inheritance prepared from the foundation of the world, a Father's gift to heirs, not a wage bargained by strangers. Notice the sheep's surprise: no ledgers, no boasting, no self-salvation; they loved because grace had made them lovers. The Catholic teaching is that grace comes first, faith working through love (Galatians 5:6) is grace's own life in us, and the works God rewards are, as St. Augustine wrote, nothing other than his own gifts crowned: when God crowns our merits, he crowns his own gifts (Letter 194.5.19). So the honest resolution honors both testimonies: with St. Paul, salvation is grace, never our unaided achievement; with St. Matthew, the grace that saves actually transforms, and what it makes of us, shown in mercy to the least, is what the Judge will name on the last day. Faith alone that leaves the hungry unfed is, as St. James says outright, dead; and works without grace were never on offer. The sheep are not saved by works instead of grace: they are what grace looks like when it has been allowed to finish its work.

Send (12 minutes)

1. Of the six works on the King's list, which one have you never done, not once? What is the nearest opportunity to change that?
2. If the Master returned tonight, what buried talent would you have to explain? What would digging it up this month look like?

Live It This Week

- Choose one of the six works and do it this week, in person where possible: the scene's verbs are visits, not transfers.
- Pray each morning: Lord, let me recognize you today in the least, and not walk past.
- Read Matthew 26–27 before next session. Come a few minutes early if you can, and come quietly: next week we stand at the cross, and the session will be reverent by design.

Closing Prayer

Son of man, enthroned on the clouds of heaven, your dominion is everlasting and your judgment is mercy remembered. Fill our lamps with the oil that cannot be borrowed, put your talents in our hands to work, and open our eyes to your face in the least of your brethren, until the day you come, and we hear, please, Lord, the words: come, O blessed of my Father. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 25:40 (RSV2CE): *“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”*

EMMANUEL • SESSION 12 • LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

Watch, Therefore · Matthew 24–25

Primary Text

• Matthew 24:1–3 · Matthew 24:15–22, 34, 36 · Matthew 24:30 · Matthew 25:1–13 · Matthew 25:14–30 · Matthew 25:31–46

Live Discovery Passages

• Daniel 7:13–14 (the Son of man enthroned)

Background Passages

• Ezekiel 34:17–24 (sheep and goats) · Daniel 12:1–3 (two destinies) · Isaiah 58:6–10 (the chosen fast) · Matthew 7:21–27 and 16:27 (Matthew's pattern) · Ephesians 2:8–10, Galatians 5:6, James 2:14–17 (for the steelman)

Catechism

• CCC 671–673 · CCC 1038–1041 · CCC 2447

Memory Verse

• Matthew 25:40

Do Not Forget

• Closing note to the group: next session is the Passion; come quietly, the session will be reverent by design.

The Blood of the Covenant

Matthew 26–27 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the night and the day toward which every thread has been running: the four verbs of the feedings return at a Passover table and the bread thread resolves in the institution of the Eucharist; the cup Jesus asked the Zebedees about is accepted in Gethsemane; Daniel 7 is quoted under oath at the trial at the cost of his life; Psalm 22 turns out to hold the whole crucifixion, dereliction and vindication both; and at the moment of death the temple curtain tears and a Gentile centurion completes the Gospel's confession.

Catholic Touchstone. The institution of the Eucharist as the sacrifice of the new covenant, engaged with the strongest symbolic-reading objection; the propitiatory character of Christ's offering; and Peter's fall and tears held honestly beside his office.

Tone note for the leader. This session should feel different, and you should say so at the start. Keep the room quieter, the transitions slower, and the discussion reverent. Consider candles and a crucifix on the table. The session ends in silence rather than conversation, and the closing prayer instructions reflect that. If your parish schedule allows, ending the night with a visit to the tabernacle or a few minutes of adoration is the perfect coda.

What You Need to Know

Matthew sets the Last Supper explicitly at Passover, the night Israel remembered the lamb whose blood turned death aside and the meal that made a people. Into that loaded liturgy Jesus speaks new words over old elements. Watch the four verbs of 26:26: he took bread, blessed, broke, and gave, the exact sequence the group filed away at the feeding of the five thousand. The bread thread resolves here, and the resolution is the sentence at the center of Christian history: Take, eat; this is my body.

Over the cup he says: this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Every phrase is loaded. "Blood of the covenant" quotes Exodus 24:8, which the group discovers live: Moses threw sacrificial blood on the people to seal the Sinai covenant, saying "behold the blood of the covenant." Jesus claims that role for his own blood: a new covenant sealed in a better blood, as Jeremiah 31:31 promised. "Poured out" is sacrificial language; "for many" is Isaiah 53's Servant vocabulary, continuous with the ransom saying of 20:28; "for the forgiveness of sins" states the offering's efficacy, and it is worth noticing that Matthew alone among the evangelists records that phrase here, the same evangelist whose first chapter said Jesus would save his people from their sins. The Church's teaching that the Mass makes present this one sacrifice, truly propitiatory, offered once for all and never repeated but re-presented, stands on this table (CCC 1365-1367).

Gethsemane resolves the cup thread with terrible beauty: the One who asked the Zebedees "are you able to drink the cup" now falls on his face before it: my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. The prophets' cup of wrath (Isaiah 51:17) is accepted by the

only one able to drink it, in the prayer that fulfills his own Our Father: your will be done. He finds the three asleep, and his word to Peter, the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak, is diagnosis and mercy at once.

At the Sanhedrin trial, the high priest puts Jesus under oath by the living God: tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus answers, and then spends his life on a Scripture quotation: hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven. He has fused Psalm 110 (the session 11 riddle: sit at my right hand) with Daniel 7 (the session 12 discovery: coming on clouds to receive dominion). The high priest tears his robes and cries blasphemy, because he understands the claim perfectly. The group armed with both texts will understand it too, and understand that Jesus died on oath for the claim this study has watched him build for thirteen weeks.

Hold Peter and Judas side by side, as Matthew does. Both fail catastrophically in the same night; the difference is not the size of the sin but what each does next. Peter, who swore he would die first, denies three times before a servant girl, and the Gospel's most human verse follows: he went out and wept bitterly. Judas repents in the older sense, returns the silver, despairs, and destroys himself. Peter's tears water the office he will still hold; Judas's sorrow collapses inward, and Matthew never shows him carrying it back to the One he betrayed, though mercy was still on offer. The Church has never pronounced on his final fate; she holds the two men side by side as the anatomy of repentance and the anatomy of despair. The Church has never needed her first pope to be sinless; she has needed him to weep and be restored, which is exactly what happened.

At the crucifixion, Matthew writes with Psalm 22 open, and tonight the group reads it whole: the mockers wagging heads (Ps 22:7), "he trusts in God; let God deliver him" (22:8), the divided garments and cast lots (22:18), and the cry from the cross itself, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me, which is the psalm's first line. A dying rabbi quoting a psalm's opening line can summon the whole psalm, and Matthew's own weave of Psalm 22 through the scene (verses 7, 8, and 18) shows he means us to read it whole; and Psalm 22 does not end in dereliction: it turns, and ends in vindication, proclamation to the nations, and a feast for the afflicted: "all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD." The cry of abandonment is real, Christ truly tasting the far country of sin (CCC 603), and it is simultaneously the first line of a psalm that ends in resurrection-shaped triumph. Both are true; neither cancels the other.

At the moment of death, Matthew reports a cascade of signs: the temple curtain torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shaken and the rocks split, the tombs opened and the bodies of sleeping saints raised (Matthew alone records this, and their appearances wait until after his resurrection, 27:53), and then, in response to it all, the centurion's confession. The curtain guarded the Holy of Holies, the chamber of the Presence; torn from top to bottom, as if by hands from above, it preaches the Emmanuel thread's penultimate note: the Presence is no longer curtailed, the forsaken house of 23:38 gives way to access thrown open by the blood of the covenant. And the confession, truly this was the Son of God, comes from a Roman centurion and his men: a Gentile soldier completes the arc his countryman began in chapter 8, and the sons of Abraham promise edges toward its final scene.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Exodus 24:3–8.** Behold the blood of the covenant: Moses seals Sinai with sacrificial blood; Jesus seals the new covenant with his own, discovered live tonight.

- **Jeremiah 31:31–34.** The promised new covenant with forgiveness at its heart: the same chapter that wept with Rachel in Session 1 now keeps its greatest promise.
- **Isaiah 53:11–12 and 51:17.** Poured out for many; the cup of wrath: the Servant and the cup converge at the table and in the garden.
- **Zechariah 13:7.** Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered: quoted by Jesus at 26:31 on the way to the Mount of Olives.
- **Psalms 22.** The whole crucifixion in one psalm: dereliction, mockery, pierced hands, divided garments, and the turn to vindication and the nations, read whole tonight.
- **Psalms 110:1 with Daniel 7:13.** Fused in Jesus' answer under oath: seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Ignatius of Antioch (Letter to the Smyrnaeans)

Within living memory of the apostles, Ignatius names as the mark of false teachers that they abstain from the Eucharist because they do not confess that it is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which the Father raised. The Church's realism about the Lord's words is as old as her martyrs.

Voices of the Church: St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Mystagogical Catecheses)

Instructing the newly baptized, Cyril tells them not to judge by taste but to be fully assured by faith: since Christ himself declared of the bread, this is my body, who shall dare to doubt? What seems bread is not bread, though it tastes so, but the Body of Christ; he who changed water to wine at Cana is worthy of our trust when he speaks over bread and wine.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Expositions on the Psalms)

Augustine hears Psalm 22 prayed by the whole Christ: the Head cries out in the words of our darkness, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me, taking the voice of sinful humanity into his own mouth, and the same psalm runs on to the feast of the poor and the turning of all nations, because the cross he describes is the cross that conquers.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 610–611.** At the supper Jesus anticipated the free offering of his life and transformed the Last Supper into the memorial of his sacrifice; the institution of the Eucharist made the apostles priests of the new covenant.
- **CCC 1339.** Jesus chose the time of Passover to fulfill what he had announced at Capernaum: giving his disciples his Body and his Blood.

- CCC 1365-1367. Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice: the sacrifice of the cross made present, its memory perpetuated, its saving power applied; the Council of Trent teaches this one sacrifice is truly propitiatory.

- **CCC 603.** Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he had sinned, but in the redeeming love that united him to the Father, he assumed us in our estrangement from God, so that he could say in our name: my God, my God, why have you forsaken me.

Thread Watch

- **Bread thread (RESOLVE).** Took, blessed, broke, gave: filed silently in Session 8, cashed at the table. Let a participant notice the four verbs before you point at them; ask, if needed, “where have we heard these four verbs in this order?”

- **Cup thread (RESOLVE).** From “are you able to drink the cup” to “let this cup pass... nevertheless, your will be done.” The Our Father of Session 4 is prayed by its author at the worst moment in history.

- **Daniel 7 and Psalm 110 (converge).** Both discovered in prior sessions, both quoted by Jesus under oath. The study's preparation makes the trial scene land with full force; let the group experience recognizing the texts themselves.

- **Emmanuel thread (penultimate note).** The curtain torn from top to bottom: the Presence uncurtained. One note remains, next week, in the Gospel's last sentence.

- **Sign of Jonah (about to cash).** Three days. Say nothing; next week the note comes due.

Session Goals

1. Participants recognize the four verbs and discover Exodus 24 inside the words of institution.
2. Participants hear the strongest symbolic reading of “this is my body” and can answer it from the Passover context, the covenant blood, St. Paul, and the earliest Church.
3. Participants connect the trial answer to Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 and can state what Jesus died claiming.
4. Participants read Psalm 22 whole and can hold real dereliction and real vindication together.
5. Participants contrast Peter and Judas and can articulate why tears, not sinlessness, mark the difference.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 10 min · Build 60 min · Send 8 min · Closing silence and prayer 12 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: compress the Peter and Judas comparison into a read of 26:69–75 with one question (saves about 6 minutes), then drop the Dig Deeper on Barabbas (saves about 4 minutes). Do not cut the institution sequence, the steelman, the trial scene, or Psalm 22.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 13 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Blood of the Covenant

Matthew 26–27 · 90 Minutes

A Word Before You Begin

Tell the group plainly: tonight is different. We are standing at the table, in the garden, and at the cross. Keep phones away, let silences sit, and do not rush anything. The session ends in silence on purpose.

Opening Prayer

Father, on the night he was betrayed, your Son took bread. Bring us to that table tonight with unshod hearts. Let us watch with him one hour, hear his words over the bread and the cup, and stand near the cross without looking away. We ask it through Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Win (10 minutes)

1. What is the most meaningful meal you have ever been part of, and what made it more than food?
2. When have last words, of a parent, a friend, anyone, carried more weight than a thousand earlier conversations?

Build (60 minutes)

The Table

1. Read Matthew 26:17–19 and 26:26–29. What feast frames this meal, and what did that night mean to every Jew at the table? Read verse 26 slowly and list the four verbs over the bread, in order. Where has this study heard exactly that sequence?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Passover: the lamb whose blood turned death aside, the meal that made Israel a people, kept every year as a living memorial. The four verbs: he took, blessed, broke, and gave, the precise sequence we filed away at the feeding of the five thousand. The wilderness feedings were rehearsals; this is the performance. And over that bread, at that feast, he says the sentence at the center of Christian history: Take, eat; this is my body.

2. **Live discovery.** Now the cup. Read verse 28 phrase by phrase, then have someone find Exodus 24:3–8 and read it aloud. What did Moses do with the blood, and what did he say? Then a second finder: Jeremiah 31:31–34. What did God promise, and what sits at that covenant's heart? Assemble what Jesus is claiming at this table.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

At Sinai, Moses threw the blood of sacrifice on the people and said: behold the blood of the

covenant which the LORD has made with you. Jeremiah promised a new covenant, not like the old, with sins forgiven and remembered no more. Jesus takes both in his hands: THIS is MY blood of THE covenant, poured out (sacrificial language) for many (Isaiah 53's Servant, our ransom verse of Session 10) for the forgiveness of sins, the very mission his name announced in chapter 1. He is sealing the new covenant Jeremiah promised, in a better blood than Sinai's, at the table before the altar of the cross. This is why the Church calls the Mass a sacrifice: not a new death, but this one offering made present until he comes.

Build Then Press: Did He Mean It Literally?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

Many Evangelical Christians read the words of institution as vivid metaphor, and their case deserves its full weight. Jesus said “I am the door” and “I am the vine” without becoming lumber or a plant; “this is my body” can be the same figure. He was bodily present at the table, holding the bread in his hands: how could the bread be the body that held it? Passover itself was a memorial meal, and Jesus says “do this in remembrance of me”: remembrance, not re-offering. On this reading the Supper is a precious symbol and proclamation of the cross, and the Catholic claim of a real change asks the words to bear more than table language can carry. This objection is sincere, textually argued, and made by people who love the Lord's Supper. Let it stand at full height.

3. Now press. First, context: at a Passover, was the lamb on the table a symbol of a lamb? Second, the cup word: can “blood of the covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins” live as pure metaphor, given what covenant blood did at Sinai? Third, the apostles' own reading: **Live discovery:** have someone read 1 Corinthians 11:27–29. What does St. Paul say an unworthy communicant is guilty of, and what must be discerned? Finally, weigh the earliest witnesses outside the New Testament, in tonight's Voices.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

“I am the door” has no context of doors; no one at the table reached for a hinge. But “this is my body” is spoken at Passover, over the elements of a sacrificial meal, where the lamb was not a symbol of a lamb but the sacrifice itself, eaten. The cup word will not shrink to metaphor: covenant blood, from Sinai forward, is real blood that really seals, and “poured out for the forgiveness of sins” claims an efficacy no figure of speech performs. St. Paul, our earliest written witness, reads the words with unnerving realism: whoever eats and drinks unworthily is guilty of profaning THE BODY AND BLOOD of the Lord, and eats judgment by not discerning the body: language without meaning if the bread is only bread. And the men taught by the apostles say it plainly: St. Ignatius, within living memory of John, defines heretics as those who deny the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior.

Now the honest concessions. Yes, the Supper is a memorial, and the Church says so in every Mass, because the biblical memorial (the Passover's own category) does not merely recall an event but makes its power present to a new generation: remembrance and reality are allies, not rivals. And yes, how bread becomes his Body while he sat holding it is mystery past our physics; the Church has never claimed to explain the how, only to trust the who. St. Cyril's counsel to the newly baptized

remains the Catholic posture: do not judge by taste; the one who turned water to wine has told you what this is. At every Mass, the four verbs sound again, and the words are his, not ours.

The Cup Accepted

4. Read Matthew 26:36–46. What does Jesus pray about “this cup,” and where has this study met that cup? Listen for a prayer inside his prayer: what petition from Session 4 does he pray at the worst moment in history? And what is his word to the sleeping Peter?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The cup he asked the Zebedees about, the prophets' cup of wrath, now stands before him, and he asks, if possible, that it pass, sorrowful even to death: the dread is real, and it is our dread, assumed. Then he prays his own prayer: not as I will, but as you will; your will be done, the Our Father's third petition, prayed by its author face-down in a garden. The cup thread resolves not in heroics but in obedience. To Peter: watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak, diagnosis and mercy in one sentence, and the last coaching Peter gets before his own test.

On Oath

5. Read Matthew 26:57–68. The high priest puts Jesus under oath by the living God. Jesus' answer spends two Scriptures this study has already discovered: name them both from memory if you can (Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13). What exactly is he claiming, why does the high priest tear his robes, and what does it mean that Jesus says this HERE, under oath, with his life in the balance?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Seated at the right hand of Power: Psalm 110, David's Lord enthroned beside God, the riddle no one could answer in the temple. Coming on the clouds of heaven: Daniel 7, the Son of man receiving everlasting dominion from the Ancient of Days. Fused, under oath, before the high priest of Israel: you will see me vindicated, enthroned, and given the kingdom. The high priest understands perfectly, which is why he tears his robes and cries blasphemy: this is a claim to sit where God sits. Jesus is silent at false testimony and speaks only to state, on oath, at the cost of his life, the identity this study has watched him build for thirteen weeks. Men die for many things; men do not usually die on oath for a metaphor.

Peter's Tears

6. Read Matthew 26:69–75, then glance at 27:3–5. Peter and Judas both fail catastrophically in the same night. What is the same, and what is utterly different? Why does the Church need her first pope's story to include this chapter?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Both betray; both are named in advance; both are loved to the end. Peter breaks before a servant girl after swearing he would die first, and then the cock crows, he remembers, and he goes out and

weeps bitterly: sorrow that turns back toward the One denied. Judas is seized by remorse, returns the silver, and despairs: sorrow that turns inward, never shown turning back toward the One betrayed, though mercy was still on offer. The difference is not the size of the sin but the direction of the sorrow. The Church has never needed her first pope to be sinless; she has needed him to weep and be restored, and the risen Lord will see to the restoration. If your own worst night is somewhere in this scene, note which man wept toward Jesus.

The Psalm of the Cross

7. Live discovery, done as one act. Read Matthew 27:33–50 aloud, slowly. Then have one strong reader read Psalm 22, the WHOLE psalm, verses 1 through 31, while everyone else follows in Matthew. Mark every collision. Then answer: is the cry of verse 46 despair? What does quoting a psalm's first line invoke, and where does this psalm end?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The collisions: wagging heads (Ps 22:7 / Mt 27:39), “he trusts in God; let God deliver him” (22:8 / 27:43), divided garments and lots (22:18 / 27:35), and the cry itself, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me, the psalm's first line in Jesus' own mouth. The dereliction is real: he has assumed our estrangement, tasting the far country of sin in our name (CCC 603); do not explain the darkness away. And a first line can summon a whole psalm; Matthew has already woven verses 7, 8, and 18 into the scene, so we are meant to read it whole, and the psalm turns: the afflicted one is heard, the poor eat and are satisfied, and all the ends of the earth remember and turn to the LORD. The cross is dereliction and victory in one act; Psalm 22 holds both, and so must we.

8. Read Matthew 27:50–54. What does Matthew report happening at the moment of death? Name every sign, and notice what the centurion's words are a response to. What did the curtain guard, and what does “from top to bottom” suggest? And listen to who says “Truly this was the Son of God”: what arc does that voice complete?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The temple curtain torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shaken and the rocks split, the tombs opened and the bodies of the saints raised (a preview, Matthew notes, that waits for his resurrection, 27:53), and then the centurion's confession, the human response all these signs demand. The curtain sealed the Holy of Holies, the chamber of the Presence, and torn from the TOP, as by hands from above, it preaches what the blood of the covenant has purchased: the Presence is uncurtained, the forsaken house of 23:38 answered by access thrown open. And the confession comes from a Roman centurion and his men: a Gentile soldier completes what a Gentile centurion began in chapter 8, and Abraham's all-nations promise stands at the foot of the cross. Hold the Emmanuel note; the Gospel has one sentence left to say about presence, and we hear it next week.

Send (8 minutes)

1. You will hear the four verbs and the cup words at Mass this Sunday. What will be different about how you hear them?

2. In silence, not aloud: where are you in this story tonight, at the table, asleep in the garden, by the fire, at the foot of the cross? Tell him.

Live It This Week

- Attend Mass this week with tonight in your hands: at the words of institution, hear Exodus 24, Jeremiah 31, and the upper room.
- Pray Psalm 22 once, whole, beginning to end, for someone in dereliction right now.
- If it has been long since confession, let Peter's tears lead you there before this study ends: weep toward him, not away.

Closing: Silence, Then Prayer

Keep two full minutes of silence, by the clock, before praying. Then, quietly: Lord Jesus Christ, at the table you gave us your Body and Blood; in the garden you drank the cup; on the cross you prayed our psalm into the darkness and tore the curtain from top to bottom. We have no words tonight that are better than silence, except these: truly you are the Son of God. Stay with us. Amen. If possible, end the night before the tabernacle.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 26:28 (RSV2CE): *"...for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

EMMANUEL · SESSION 13 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The Blood of the Covenant · Matthew 26–27

Primary Text

• Matthew 26:17–19, 26–29 · Matthew 26:36–46 · Matthew 26:57–68 · Matthew 26:69–75 with 27:3–5 · Matthew 27:33–50 · Matthew 27:50–54

Live Discovery Passages

• Exodus 24:3–8 (blood of the covenant) · Jeremiah 31:31–34 (the new covenant) · 1 Corinthians 11:27–29 (discerning the body) · Psalm 22 entire (read against Matthew 27)

Background Passages

• Isaiah 53:11–12 and 51:17 (for many; the cup) · Zechariah 13:7 (quoted at 26:31) · Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13 (the answer on oath) · Matthew 14:19 (the four verbs) · CCC 1365–1367 text at hand for the steelman landing

Catechism

• CCC 610–611 · CCC 1339 · CCC 1365–1367 · CCC 603

Memory Verse

• Matthew 26:28

Do Not Forget

• Tone: quieter room, slower transitions, two timed minutes of silence before the closing prayer, tabernacle visit if possible. Next week: bring BOTH versions of your guess (the Session 1 sheet with the Session 8 rewrite on its back).

He Is Risen: The Great Commission

Matthew 28 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover every remaining thread resolving in twenty verses: the sign of Jonah cashed on the third day, Daniel 7 fulfilled in “all authority in heaven and on earth,” Abraham’s promise kept in “all nations,” the Jordan’s Trinity spoken over every future baptism, and the Gospel’s last sentence answering its first chapter: the child named God-with-us says, I am with you always, to the close of the age. The study ends where it began, with their own guesses in their hands, and the title of the whole journey finally explained.

Catholic Touchstone. The missionary mandate of the Church, baptism in the Trinitarian name, the historical credibility of the resurrection, and the abiding presence of Christ in his Church, above all in the Eucharist, until the close of the age.

What You Need to Know

Matthew’s resurrection account is compact and mighty. The two Marys come to see the tomb; an earthquake, an angel like lightning who rolls the stone away and sits on it, guards frozen like dead men, and the announcement on which the world turns: He is not here; for he has risen, AS HE SAID. That last phrase quietly cashes the study’s oldest unpaid note: the sign of Jonah, three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, promised in chapter 12, planted in Session 6, now paid in full. The angel’s commission to the women, and then the risen Lord’s own greeting to them on the road, makes women the first witnesses and first evangelists of the resurrection, a detail no ancient inventor would have chosen, since a woman’s testimony carried little legal weight in that world. The improbable detail is a fingerprint of honesty.

Matthew alone records the guard and the bribe (28:11–15): the soldiers report everything, the chief priests pay them to say the disciples stole the body while we slept, and Matthew notes the story was still circulating when he wrote. Tonight’s build-then-press works this scene as the study’s closing apologetic, because the oldest objection to the resurrection concedes the decisive fact: the tomb was empty. Nobody bribes soldiers to explain away a body that is still there. The stolen-body story must also explain sleeping guards who somehow witnessed the theft, disciples who all fled at the arrest (26:56) and a leader who denied him before a servant girl (26:69–75), men who then staked their lives on a proclamation they would have known was a lie, and a movement that exploded in the very city where the tomb could be checked. Men die for false beliefs sincerely held; men do not die for what they know they invented, and this preaching did cost lives: James’s within a decade (Acts 12:2), and Peter’s and Paul’s by the testimony of the first generation (1 Clement 5).

The finale on the Galilee mountain (28:16–20) is the Gospel’s whole architecture completing itself, and the leader’s job tonight is mostly to stay out of the way while the group watches it happen. “They worshiped him; but some doubted”: Matthew’s honesty to the last, and comfort for every honest

doubter since; the risen Lord commissions that mixed group anyway. Then the four alls. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me: Daniel 7:13-14, discovered in Session 12, its coming-on-the-clouds language taken up on oath at the trial in Session 13 alongside Psalm 110:1, is hereby announced as fulfilled; the Son of man has come to the Ancient of Days and received the everlasting dominion, and the mountain in Galilee is the readers' view of the enthronement. Make disciples of all nations: Genesis 22, discovered in Session 1, the oath to Abraham that in his seed all nations would be blessed, now becomes the Church's standing orders; the genealogy's "son of Abraham" was a promissory note and this is its payment. Baptizing them in the name (singular, one name, three persons) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: the Trinity manifest at the Jordan in Session 2 is now spoken over every baptism until the end of time, and the group that learned why Jesus stood in the water now hears what he was filling it with. Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you: the Sermon's hearing-and-doing, the discourse's watchfulness, the judgment's mercy: the whole moral architecture of the Gospel handed to the Church as curriculum.

And then the last sentence. And behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age. Have the group physically turn back to Matthew 1:23 and read the two verses aloud, back to back: his name shall be called Emmanuel, which means, God with us... and behold, I am with you always. The Gospel is a single arch, and its keystone is presence: announced in a name, manifest at the Jordan, claimed over the temple, promised to the two or three, hidden in the least of these, uncurtained at the cross, and now spoken as the risen Lord's final, standing promise. This is the moment to reveal that the study's title was the Gospel's master key all along, and to name where that presence lives now: in the Church he built on the rock, in the least he told us to serve, and above all on the altar, where the four verbs sound until he comes. The final guess ceremony then closes the circle: both versions of their answer, read side by side, become each participant's own written record of what a Gospel can do to a person in fourteen weeks.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Jonah 1:17 with Matthew 12:39–40.** Three days in the heart of the earth: the only sign promised, now given. He has risen, as he said.
- **Daniel 7:13–14.** All authority, all peoples, an everlasting dominion: the enthronement seen in vision, invoked on oath at the trial, announced as accomplished on the mountain, reread live tonight.
- **Genesis 22:15–18.** The oath that through Abraham's descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed, as the apostles quote it (Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:8): Session 1's discovery becomes Session 14's marching orders, reread live tonight.
- **Isaiah 7:14 with Matthew 1:23.** Emmanuel, God with us: the name that opened the Gospel, answered by its last sentence.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Athanasius (On the Incarnation)

Athanasius argues that the surest proof of the resurrection is its ongoing effect: death, once mankind's tyrant, is now trampled and mocked by Christians, even children and young women, who face it without fear. A dead man works no such change; the Savior who despoiled death is alive and active, and the courage of the martyrs is his daily demonstration.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

On the final promise, Chrysostom insists that “I am with you always” was not spoken to the apostles alone, for they would not remain until the close of the age: the Lord speaks to the whole body of the faithful in every generation, one Church across the centuries, accompanied by her Head until the end.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Easter Sermons)

Augustine preaches that the resurrection of Christ is the distinctive faith of Christians: that he died, even the pagans believe; that he rose, this is the Church's own treasure and the hinge of everything. We are Easter people, and our faith stands or falls with the empty tomb.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 641–644.** The women were the first messengers of Christ's resurrection, sent to the apostles themselves; even confronted with the risen Lord, some disciples doubted, which shows the resurrection faith was born, under grace, from direct experience of the reality, not from credulity.
- **CCC 645 and 656.** The risen Jesus is not a ghost or a resuscitated corpse but the same Jesus in a glorified body; the resurrection is a real event with historically verified manifestations, and at the same time transcends history as the entrance of Christ's humanity into God's glory.
- **CCC 849–850.** The missionary mandate: the Church, sent by God to the nations, by the command of the Lord in Matthew 28:19–20, exists to evangelize; the mission has its origin in the love of the Father, Son, and Spirit into whose communion the baptized are drawn.

Thread Watch: Final Accounting

- **Sign of Jonah: PAID.** “As he said.” Let the group name it.
- **Son of man / Daniel 7: FULFILLED.** All authority in heaven and on earth. Reread Daniel 7:13–14 live and let the recognition land.
- **Son of Abraham / all nations: FULFILLED.** Reread Genesis 22:15–18 live: Session 1 returns as marching orders.
- **Baptism and Trinity: FULFILLED.** The Jordan's manifestation becomes the Church's formula.
- **Doing-the-word: HANDED ON.** Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
- **Emmanuel: RESOLVED.** Matthew 1:23 and 28:20 read aloud back to back. Then, and only then, explain the study's title. Fulfillment count: invite final tallies of the formula citations; most readers count between ten and fourteen depending on criteria, and the group's number is theirs to defend.
- **Final guess ceremony.** Both versions read privately side by side; volunteers share what changed. Close by asking each person to answer Jesus' question aloud, one sentence each, around the circle: “Who do you say that I am?”

Session Goals

1. Participants can present the resurrection's historical credibility from Matthew's own guard-and-bribe scene.
2. Participants witness Daniel 7 and Genesis 22 fulfilled in the commission, using their own prior discoveries.
3. Participants read 1:23 and 28:20 back to back and can articulate the Emmanuel arch of the whole Gospel.
4. Participants complete the final guess ceremony and each confess, in one sentence, who they say Jesus is.
5. Participants name where the promised presence lives now: the Church, the least, and the Eucharist, and choose their next step after the study.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 10 min · Build 50 min · Final guess ceremony 15 min · Send and Live It 8 min · Closing prayer 7 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: compress Build question 1 to the announcement and “as he said” (saves about 5 minutes), then shorten the bribe scene press to its central point, nobody bribes soldiers about a body still in the tomb (saves about 5 minutes). Do not cut the Daniel 7 and Genesis 22 rereadings, the 1:23 with 28:20 reading, or the final ceremony.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 14 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

He Is Risen: The Great Commission

Matthew 28 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, fourteen weeks ago we opened this Gospel at a genealogy and a name: Emmanuel, God with us. Tonight we stand at an empty tomb and a mountain in Galilee. Let us hear the last sentence of this Gospel the way the first disciples heard it, and send us from this table the way you sent them from that mountain. Through the risen Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (10 minutes)

1. What is the best news you have ever received, and what did you do in the first sixty seconds after hearing it?
2. Looking back across these fourteen weeks: which single session or discovery has stayed with you most?

Build (50 minutes)

As He Said

1. Read Matthew 28:1–10. Catalog everything unexpected in this scene: who comes, what they find, who speaks, and who is sent to tell the apostles. Then the angel's phrase: "he has risen, AS HE SAID." What old promissory note from this study does that phrase cash? And why is it historically significant that women are the first witnesses?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

An earthquake, an angel like lightning sitting on the rolled-away stone, guards frozen like dead men, and the announcement: he is not here; he has risen, as he said. "As he said" pays the study's oldest note: the sign of Jonah, three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, the only sign that generation was promised, now given. And the first witnesses, first believers, and first evangelists of the resurrection are women, whose testimony carried little weight in that world's courts: no inventor building a persuasive story would have chosen them, which is precisely why their presence rings true. The risen Lord himself meets them on the road, and they take hold of his feet, flesh and bone, not phantom, and worship him.

Build Then Press: The Oldest Objection

2. Read Matthew 28:11–15 before the press.

The Oldest Objection, Given at Full Strength

The alternative explanation is as old as the first Easter and Matthew records it himself: the disciples came by night and stole the body while the guards slept. A skeptic can put it strongly: the

witnesses were interested parties; the appearances were reported by believers; grief produces visions; and a stolen body plus devoted preaching explains Christianity without a miracle. This is the objection every generation retells in new vocabulary, and Christians owe it a serious answer rather than a dismissal. Let it stand.

3. Now press on the scene Matthew reports. What did the chief priests NOT say to the soldiers, and what does the bribe therefore concede? Walk the stolen-body story through its own details: sleeping witnesses, the

disciples we watched flee in chapter 26, the city where the preaching began, and the deaths the preachers died. What can that story not explain?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Notice what the authorities never say: “the body is right here.” Producing the corpse would have ended the movement in an afternoon; instead they purchase an explanation for its absence, which concedes the one fact everything turns on: the tomb was empty, and both sides knew it. The story they buy refutes itself: sleeping guards cannot testify to what happened while they slept. It must then explain how the men who all fled at the arrest, and whose leader crumbled at a servant girl’s question, found the nerve to rob a guarded tomb, and why they proclaimed the resurrection first in Jerusalem, the one city where the claim could be checked against the tomb, and why they kept proclaiming it under threat of death, a course that cost James his life within a decade (Acts 12:2) and, by the testimony of the Church’s first generation, Peter’s as well. Men suffer and die sincerely for false beliefs; men do not do so for what they know they invented, and the thieves of the theory would have known. Add St. Athanasius’ living evidence: death itself has been mocked by Christians ever since, which is not the effect of a corpse. “Some doubted” even on the mountain (28:17), and the Lord commissioned them anyway: honest doubt has a place at this table, and always has. What it must reckon with is an empty tomb both sides conceded and lives no lie has ever produced.

The Four Alls

4. Live discovery, the study’s last two. Read Matthew 28:16–20. Then send two finders back to passages this group has already discovered: one rereads Daniel 7:13–14 (Session 12), the other rereads Genesis 22:15–18 (Session 1, our first discovery). Read each aloud, then read the commission again. What is Jesus announcing with “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”? And whose ancient promise becomes the Church’s marching orders in “all nations”?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Daniel saw one like a son of man come to the Ancient of Days and receive dominion, glory, and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. On the mountain, Jesus announces the vision accomplished: all authority in heaven and on earth HAS BEEN GIVEN to me. The trial claim of last week is the enthronement fact of this week; the mountain in Galilee is our view of Daniel 7 fulfilled.

And Genesis 22, the first passage this group ever discovered: the oath that through Abraham’s descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed. (Leader note: the RSV2CE renders the verse

as the nations blessing themselves by his descendants; Acts 3:25 and Galatians 3:8 show the apostles receiving it as the nations blessed in Abraham's offspring, which is the reading fulfilled in the commission.) Fourteen weeks ago we found the promise; tonight it becomes standing orders: go therefore and make disciples of ALL NATIONS. The genealogy's "son of Abraham" was a promissory note, and the Great Commission is its payment. Baptizing them in the NAME, singular, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: the Trinity we watched manifest over the Jordan is now spoken over every baptism until the end of time. Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded: the Sermon, the discourses, the mercy of the judgment scene, the whole curriculum handed to the Church. Four alls: all authority, all nations, all commands, and one more coming in the final sentence.

The Last Sentence and the First Name

5. Now the study's final act of discovery. One reader finds Matthew 1:23 and stands ready. Another has 28:20. Read them aloud, back to back, slowly: first the name, then the promise. Then answer together: what is this whole Gospel about, in one word? And where does that presence live NOW?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

"His name shall be called Emmanuel, which means, God with us." ... "And behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age." The Gospel is a single arch from name to promise, and its keystone is presence: announced at the conception, manifest at the Jordan, claimed over the temple (something greater is here), promised to the two or three, hidden in the least of these, uncurtained at the cross from top to bottom, and now spoken by the risen Lord as his standing, final word. There is no "Ascension departure" in Matthew, and that is the point of how he ends: the Gospel closes not with a goodbye but with a presence that never leaves. This is why our study bears the name it does: Emmanuel was never just Session 1's memory verse; it was the master key to the whole Gospel of Matthew.

And where does that presence live now? Exactly where this Gospel put it: in the Church he built on the rock and promised to accompany, against which the gates of Hades shall not prevail; in the least of these, where the King waits in disguise; and above all on the altar, where the four verbs sound at every Mass and "this is my body" keeps the last sentence literally: I am with you always. The tabernacle lamp in your parish is Matthew 28:20 burning in real time.

The Final Guess Ceremony (15 minutes)

Leader, take this slowly. Everyone takes out both versions of their answer: the sealed Session 1 original and the Session 8 rewrite. Read them privately, side by side. Then invite volunteers: what changed between your two answers, and what changed it? Receive everything without correction. Then, to close the circle the way Caesarea Philippi opened it, go around the room and let each person answer Jesus' own question aloud, in one sentence, present tense: "Who do you say that I am?" The leader answers last.

Send (8 minutes)

1. The commission is not advice; it is standing orders addressed to the baptized, including the doubting. Who is your “all nations”: the person or place your discipleship has been avoiding?
2. What is your next step when this study ends: another book of Scripture, a ministry, an hour before the tabernacle? Name it to one person in this room before you leave.

Live It This Week and Beyond

- Visit the Blessed Sacrament once this week and pray Matthew 28:20 there: the promise, kept, in the room with you.
- Tell one person outside this group one thing you found in this Gospel. The commission begins at that size.
- Keep both versions of your guess inside your Bible at Matthew 16. Read them again in a year.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham, Son of the living God: Emmanuel. You have been with us in this word for fourteen weeks, and you will be with us always, to the close of the age. All authority in heaven and on earth is yours: send us, then, as you sent the eleven, worshiping and still learning, to make disciples, beginning with ourselves. Stay with us, Lord, on the altar, in the least, and in your Church, until we see you face to face. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 28:20b (RSV2CE): “...and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

EMMANUEL · SESSION 14 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

He Is Risen: The Great Commission · Matthew 28

Primary Text

- Matthew 28:1–10 · Matthew 28:11–15 · Matthew 28:16–20

Live Discovery Passages

- Daniel 7:13–14 (reread: all authority) · Genesis 22:15–18 (reread: all nations) · Matthew 1:23 with Matthew 28:20 (the arch, read back to back)

Background Passages

- Matthew 12:39–40 with Jonah 1:17 (the sign, cashed) · Matthew 26:56, 69–75 (the flight and the denials) · Matthew 3:16–17 (the Jordan Trinity)

Catechism

- CCC 641–644 · CCC 645, 656 · CCC 849–850

Memory Verse

- Matthew 28:20b

Do Not Forget

- Final ceremony order: both guess versions read privately, volunteers share, then around the circle aloud: “Who do you say that I am?” Leader answers last. Reveal the title's meaning only after 1:23 and 28:20 are read back to back.