

Session 9: One Mediator, Many Fathers

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Tonight the study walks straight at the two verses most often quoted against Catholic priesthood: "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5) and "call no man your father on earth" (Matthew 23:9). Both are built at full strength; both are answered by the simplest and most devastating tool this group now owns: reading the whole passage, and the rest of the New Testament, with the texts open. The group discovers that Paul commands universal intercession in the very paragraph that declares one mediator, that the New Testament itself is full of spiritual fathers, including Paul calling himself one, and that all fatherhood, and all mediation, flows from one source without rivalry. The night ends where the study began: with father-priests, now understood.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism, quoting the Second Vatican Council, teaches the exact principle tonight discovers in the text: just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways by his ministers and his faithful, so the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source (Lumen Gentium 62, quoted at CCC 970; the passage concerns Mary and states the principle of subordinate sharing in the one source). And on intercession: since Abraham, intercession, asking on behalf of another, has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy, and in the Church's intercession Christians participate in Christ's own intercession (CCC 2634 to 2636). One source, many sharers: the same grammar the study has used for priesthood all along.

What You Need to Know

Take the mediator text first, and take it whole. The sentence "there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" is gloriously true, and the Church confesses every word; nothing tonight qualifies it. But 1 Timothy 2:5 has a context that the objection never quotes, and the group will read it live: verses 1 to 4. "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, INTERCESSIONS, and thanksgivings be made FOR ALL MEN... This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." Paul commands every Christian to mediate in prayer for everyone, kings included, and calls it pleasing to God, and then, in the same breath of the same paragraph, says there is one mediator. Either Paul contradicted himself within one breath, or "one mediator" was never aimed at the interceding Church; it was aimed at the uniqueness of the RANSOM: one God, one Savior, one price paid for all, which is precisely why prayer for all men makes sense. The unique mediation is the spring; our intercessions are water from it, not rival wells. The study has seen this grammar before: one priesthood, shared two ways, no rivalry. The Council said it in one sentence the Catechism preserves: the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but gives rise to, a manifold cooperation which shares in the one source. Sprinkle in the New Testament's startlingly strong participation language if the group wants more: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2); "pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16); and Paul to Timothy himself: "Take heed to yourself and to your teaching... for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16). Paul tells a minister he will SAVE his hearers, in the same letter as the one-mediator verse, because instrumental language never threatened the source in Paul's mind.

Then "call no man your father." Read Matthew 23:1 to 12 whole and the target is unmistakable: religious leaders who "do all their deeds to be seen by men," who love the best seats and the salutations and the titles. And notice the command's full sweep, which the objection also never quotes: verse 8 forbids "rabbi" (teacher), verse 9 "father," verse 10 "master" or "instructor." Taken with wooden literalism, this outlaws calling your dad "father," your professor "teacher," and Mister anybody ("master" is where "mister" comes from). No one, in any church, lives that reading; the New Testament itself refuses it, and the group will catch the refusals live: Paul, "I became your FATHER in Christ Jesus through the gospel," telling the Corinthians they have countless guides but not many fathers (1 Corinthians 4:14 to 15); Stephen, before the Sanhedrin, "our father Abraham" (Acts 7:2); John writing to "fathers" (1 John 2:13 to 14); Jesus himself, in his own parable, having a man in torment cry "Father Abraham" without a syllable of correction (Luke 16:24, 30). And James 3:1 assumes the Church HAS teachers while Ephesians 4:11 says Christ GAVE teachers. The command, in context, forbids the craving of titles as self-exaltation and the treating of any man as the ultimate source of what only God gives. The positive teaching underneath it is Ephesians 3:14 to 15, tonight's memory verse: "every family" (RSV2CE; the Greek patria, built on pater, father, has traditionally also been rendered "every fatherhood") in heaven and on earth is NAMED from the Father; human fathers, biological and spiritual, are real precisely as derivations, never as replacements. A priest called "Father" is not a rival to God any more than your dad is; both are living signs pointing at the source, and both stand under Matthew 23's judgment the moment they forget it. End the night by closing the loop the study opened in Session 1: the first priests we ever met were fathers offering for their households; the new covenant's priests are fathers of households of another kind; and every baptized man in the room who becomes a father takes up the oldest natural pattern of priestly intercession there is, exercised through his share in the baptismal priesthood.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight leans on roots already planted: Abraham the interceding father (Genesis 18, pleading for Sodom, is the classic image behind CCC 2635; use it if the room wants an Old Testament anchor for intercession), Job the father-priest from Session 1, and Moses the mediator on the mountain (Exodus 32:11 to 14, 30 to 32, where Moses' intercession is honored by God, and even offers himself for the people). God has always delighted to work through asked-for mercy; the one Mediator did not end that pattern, he grounded it.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas states tonight's distinction with his usual calm: Christ alone is the perfect mediator, for he alone reconciled the human race to God through his death; yet nothing prevents others from being called mediators in a qualified sense, as ministers and cooperators who dispose and serve, participating in the mediation of the one Mediator. In substance: subordinate mediation does not compete with Christ; it hangs from him. (A summary of his teaching on Christ the Mediator.)

Summa Theologiae III, q. 26

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Cyprian of Carthage

"He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother." Cyprian's most famous sentence names the family through which God fathers his children: the Church our mother. Set it beside Paul's "I became your father in Christ Jesus," and the household grammar of grace comes into view: a Father above and, within his family, motherhood and fatherhood in the order of grace.

On the Unity of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Irenaeus of Lyons

St. Irenaeus teaches, in substance, that the one who has been taught the faith from another's mouth is called the son of his teacher, and the teacher his father: for the disciple is begotten in the order of teaching and grace. Writing in the second century, Irenaeus treats gospel fatherhood as ordinary Christian vocabulary, exactly as Paul used it of the Corinthians. (A summary from his great work against the Gnostic heresies.)

Against Heresies, Book 4

Catechism Connection

- CCC 970, quoting Lumen Gentium 62: the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source; the conciliar text itself draws the parallel with the one priesthood shared by ministers and faithful.
- CCC 2634 to 2636: intercession as participation in Christ's own intercession; praying as Abraham did, on behalf of all, even enemies.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD C (the firstborn / father-priest): major resolution movement tonight. The father-priests of Session 1 return as the deep background of "Father" as a priestly title, and of every Christian parent's vocation. Name the loop-closing explicitly at the end of Build III; the group has earned it.
- THREAD B (serve and guard): resting.
- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): the interceding congregation of 1 Timothy 2:1 IS the royal priesthood at work; one sentence connecting last week to this week.
- THREAD A (resolved): available as an image if needed; do not force.

Session Goals

1. The group reads 1 Timothy 2:1 to 6 whole and articulates the relationship between commanded universal intercession and the one mediator.
2. The group can state the participation principle (one source, many sharers) and connect it to the study's priesthood grammar.
3. The group reads Matthew 23:1 to 12 whole, names its actual target, and discovers at least three New Testament counterexamples to the literalist reading with the texts open.
4. The group can explain Ephesians 3:14 to 15 as the positive theology of derived fatherhood.
5. The father-priest loop from Session 1 is explicitly closed.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: One mediator, whole passage (25 min)
- 0:40 Build II: Call no man father, whole passage and the hunt (25 min)
- 1:05 Build III: Every fatherhood named from the Father, and the loop closes (10 min)
- 1:15 Send (10 min)
- 1:25 Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper and reduce the Build II hunt to two counterexamples (1 Corinthians 4:15 and Luke 16:24), reading them yourself. Never cut Build III; the loop-closing is the night's destination.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, teach us tonight what your Son's unique place means and does not mean. Give us clean readings, honest answers, and gratitude for every person through whom your life has reached us. Through Christ our Lord, the one mediator. Amen.

Win

1. Who is someone who has prayed for you faithfully over the years? How do you feel knowing you have been carried like that?
2. Besides your biological parents, who has been a father or mother to you, someone who formed you, corrected you, fed you in some way? What made them that?

Build I: One Mediator, Whole Passage

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Full strength: "Your friend quotes 1 Timothy 2:5 from memory: there is ONE mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. One. Not a priest at an altar, not saints, not Mary, not anybody. Every Catholic structure that puts a creature between me and God, however politely, flunks this verse. It could not be clearer if Paul had underlined it."

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "Fair. Now let us do the thing this group always does: read the whole passage. Open 1 Timothy 2 and read verses 1 through 6 aloud, and tell me what Paul COMMANDS in verses 1 to 4, before he ever says the word mediator."

Q1. What does Paul urge "first of all"? For whom? And how does God regard it? Now: how do verses 1 to 4 and verse 5 fit together in one paragraph without Paul contradicting himself?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Paul urges "supplications, prayers, INTERCESSIONS, and thanksgivings... for all men," kings and all in authority included, and calls this "good... acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." Intercession is a Christian mediating in prayer for another; Paul commands it universally, then says "one mediator" in the same paragraph, the same breath. So "one mediator" cannot be aimed at the interceding Church Paul just mobilized; it is aimed at the uniqueness of the RANSOM: one God, one Savior, one who "gave himself as a ransom for all," which is exactly WHY prayer for all people makes sense. The unique mediation is the spring; our intercessions are water from it, not rival wells.

And you have seen this grammar all study: one priesthood of Christ, shared by ministers and faithful without rivalry. The Council states the principle in those very terms (Lumen Gentium 62, preserved at CCC 970): the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but GIVES RISE TO, a manifold cooperation that shares in the one source. If the room wants the strongest verse: in this same letter, Paul tells Timothy that by attending to his teaching "you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16). Paul tells a minister he will SAVE people, and feels no tension, because instruments never threaten the source.

DIG DEEPER

Genesis 18:22 to 33: Abraham haggling with God over Sodom, and God welcoming every round of it. Exodus 32: Moses on the mountain, and "the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people" at Moses' intercession, Moses even offering to be blotted out in their place. From the beginning, God has delighted to give mercy AS asked-for mercy, through the pleading of his friends. The one Mediator did not end that pattern; he is its source and summit, "always living to make intercession" (your Session 5 memory verse).

Build II: Call No Man Father

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Full strength: "Your friend smiles and plays the ace: Matthew 23:9. Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Red letters. A direct command of Jesus. And what does every Catholic call the man at the altar? It is not a gray area; it is a habit of direct disobedience so old nobody notices it anymore."

Read Matthew 23:1 to 12 aloud, whole.

Q2. In context: who is Jesus talking about, what are they doing wrong, and what THREE titles does he forbid (verses 8, 9, 10)? What happens if we take all three with strict literalism?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The target is the scribes and Pharisees who "do all their deeds to be seen by men," who love the places of honor and the salutations and the titles. And the command forbids not one title but three: rabbi/teacher (v. 8), father (v. 9), and master or instructor (v. 10). Strict literalism outlaws "teacher," "professor," "doctor" (Latin for teacher), "mister" (from master), and calling your own dad "father." No Christian community on earth keeps that reading, because it is not the reading. The command targets the CRAVING of titles as self-exaltation, and the treating of any man as the ultimate source of what only God gives.

LIVE DISCOVERY: THE HUNT. Say: "If the apostles heard verse 9 as an absolute ban, the rest of the New Testament should be scrubbed clean of spiritual fathers. Split up and check these four: 1 Corinthians 4:14 to 15. Acts 7:2. 1 John 2:13 to 14. And, read this one carefully, Luke 16:24, noting who is telling the story. Report back."

Q3. What did the four teams find?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Paul: "I became your FATHER in Christ Jesus through the gospel," and he sharpens it: "you have countless guides in Christ, but not many fathers." Stephen, on trial, opens with "our father Abraham": father-language used freely for a revered ancestor in grace. John addresses "fathers" as a standing group in the churches. And in Luke 16, it is JESUS HIMSELF, in his own parable, who has the rich man cry "Father Abraham" (twice, Luke 16:24 and 30) without one syllable of correction. Add Ephesians 4:11 (Christ GAVE teachers to the Church) and James 3:1 (the Church has teachers, held to stricter judgment) against verse 8's "call no man teacher," and the literalist reading is refuted by the entire apostolic generation, including the Lord's own storytelling.

Build III: Every Fatherhood Named from the Father

Read Ephesians 3:14 to 15 aloud, slowly. It is tonight's memory verse.

Q4. According to Paul, where does every family, every fatherhood, in heaven and on earth get its NAME? So what is a human father, biological or spiritual, in relation to God the Father? And now, thinking all the way back to Session 1: who were the first priests this study ever met?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"Every family," says the RSV2CE; the Greek patria is built on pater, father, and has long been rendered "every fatherhood." Either way, the point stands: every family, every fatherhood, is NAMED from the Father: derived, dependent, real precisely as a living sign of the source, never a replacement for it. Your dad being called "father" does not compete with God; it points at him, and stands under judgment the moment it forgets to. A priest called "Father" stands in exactly the same derived position: a father in the gospel, the way Paul was to Corinth, begetting and feeding a family in Christ, and Matthew 23 condemns him the moment the title becomes a throne instead of an apron.

And close the loop out loud: the first offerers this study met, back in Session 1, included FATHERS: Noah at his altar, Job rising early to offer for each of his children, Abraham building altars for his household. The oldest natural PATTERN of priestly intercession is parenthood; the new covenant's priests are fathers of households of another kind; and every parent in this room who raises children in the faith takes up that ancient pattern by way of the baptismal priesthood, a real sharing in Christ's priesthood that remains distinct from ordained office. The study began at a family altar. It was never an accident.

Send

1. Paul commanded intercession "for all men" first of all. Who is the person you have quietly decided not to pray for, and what would obeying 1 Timothy 2:1 about them cost you this week?
2. Who could you become a spiritual father or mother to, even in a small way, someone younger in the faith who needs feeding, correcting, encouraging? What is one concrete first step?

Live It This Week

- Pray 1 Timothy 2:1 to 2 literally once a day: intercede by name for one person in civil authority, whether or not you voted for them. This is priestly work, and it is commanded.
- Write or say a real thank-you this week to one spiritual father or mother in your life, and tell them one specific thing they gave you.
- If you are a parent or hope to be: bless your children (or your future children) aloud once this week, the Numbers 6 words you learned in Session 2: the domestic church at prayer.

Memory Verse

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named."

Ephesians 3:14 to 15 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, from whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named, thank you for the one Mediator who gave himself as a ransom for all, and thank you for every hand and voice through whom his mediation has reached us: parents, priests, teachers, friends who prayed. Make us faithful links in that chain, and never its end point. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 9

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- 1 Timothy 2:1 to 6 (Build I, live discovery, read aloud)
- 1 Timothy 4:16 (Build I, in the ANSWER)
- Galatians 6:2; James 5:16 (Build I, leader reference)
- Genesis 18:22 to 33; Exodus 32:11 to 14, 30 to 32 (Dig Deeper)
- Matthew 23:1 to 12 (Build II, read aloud whole)
- 1 Corinthians 4:14 to 15 (Build II, hunt team one)
- Acts 7:2 (Build II, hunt team two)
- 1 John 2:13 to 14 (Build II, hunt team three)
- Luke 16:24 (Build II, hunt team four)
- Ephesians 4:11; James 3:1 (Build II, in the ANSWER)
- Ephesians 3:14 to 15 (Build III, read aloud; memory verse source)