

Deep-Dive: Wouldn't a Miracle Convince Me?

A stand-alone session; usable in any order after the core study

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group discovers Scripture's own case study data on the demand for a convincing sign: a generation saturated in public miracles that still would not trust, a resurrection that produced a murder plot, and Jesus's flat verdict in the parable of the rich man: if they will not hear Moses and the prophets, a man back from the dead will not persuade them either.

Catholic Touchstone: Miracles are real motives of credibility, most certain signs of Revelation adapted to everyone's intelligence, so the assent of faith is no blind impulse; yet Christ's miracles invite belief and can also give offense, for they are not meant to satisfy curiosity or the desire for magic (CCC 156, 548).

HOSTING YOUR SEEKER FRIEND

Handle two tender spots:

- Your seeker friend may have once begged God for a sign, in a desperate season, and received silence. Tonight's texts are not a scolding of that prayer; Gideon asked for signs and got them, and Thomas asked and was answered. If that memory surfaces, receive it with care and without explaining it.
- Do not let the session curdle into, signs are useless. The Church stakes real weight on miracles, from the Resurrection to the medically vetted cures at Lourdes; the point tonight is what signs can and cannot do to a free will, not that they do nothing.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The objection: one undeniable, public, filmable miracle would settle the question for everyone, so God's refusal to provide it is itself evidence of his absence. It sounds unanswerable because it assumes a psychology: that human beings are neutral evidence-processors, and that a big enough sign compels belief, and belief compels love. Scripture, which is full of miracles, is strikingly pessimistic about that psychology, and tonight the group reads its case files.

The Exodus generation is the controlled experiment: ten plagues, a parted sea, fire on the mountain, bread from the sky, daily. Weeks after Sinai they cast the golden calf, and God's own exasperated summary stands in Numbers 14:11: how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs which I have wrought among them? Signs, at maximum dosage, did not produce durable trust. The New Testament repeats the result: the raising of Lazarus, a public sign with named witnesses (John records the four days at 11:39 and the emergence at 11:43-44), splits its audience, and the authorities respond by plotting to kill both Jesus and the man raised (John 11:45-53; 12:10). A raising from the dead produced a murder conspiracy. And Jesus's parable of the rich man ends with the verdict tonight is named for: neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead (Luke 16:31), a sentence with an obvious edge for readers who know how the Gospel ends.

The through-line, consistent with the core study: seeing involves the will. Evidence invites; it does not compel, because what God is after is not conceded assent but love, and love cannot be extracted by

spectacle. This is why Jesus refuses sign-on-demand (an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, Matthew 16:4) while freely working signs among the disposed. Keep the balance honest in both directions: the Church really does argue from miracles, the Resurrection above all, and really does vet modern claims with medical boards precisely because evidence matters; and Scripture really does show that even striking signs do not necessarily produce free faith. The problem the objection identifies is real. Its location is not.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The wilderness narrative (Exodus 16 through Numbers 14) is the Old Testament's sustained study of sign-saturated unbelief, and the Psalms preach it back to Israel for centuries (Psalm 78, Psalm 95: today, harden not your hearts, as at Meribah). Gideon's fleece (Judges 6) shows God's patience with an honest asker, a useful counterweight. The New Testament inherits both threads: patience with honest askers (Thomas, John the Baptist) and the verdict on sign-demanders (the sign of Jonah, Matthew 16:4, which the Church reads as the Resurrection itself: the one great sign, given, and still refusable).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

St. Augustine teaches, in substance, in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, that the daily government of the universe is a greater miracle than the feeding of the five thousand, but familiarity has dulled our wonder: men marvel at the rare and sleep through the constant. The demand for one more sign, on this account, misreads the situation: we are already inside a standing miracle and have gone blind to it by habit.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

St. Thomas teaches, in substance (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 5), that the demons believe that God exists, compelled by the evidence available to their sharper minds, and theirs is an unformed faith, real assent without charity, no virtue and no salvation (ST II-II, q. 5, a. 2). Compelled assent is not the free, charity-formed faith that saves. What God seeks, assent commanded by a will moved by love, is precisely the thing that no spectacle, however large, can force.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS

St. Irenaeus teaches in *Against Heresies* (Book IV) that God made man free from the beginning, and that there is no coercion with God: he persuades, invites, and counsels, but does not compel, because compelled service is worthless to a God who wants sons rather than slaves. A sign engineered to extract love would be exactly the coercion St. Irenaeus says God refuses on principle; and a sign that merely extracts assent gains, as the demons show, nothing worth having.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 156:** The miracles of Christ and the saints are among the motives of credibility, most certain signs of Revelation adapted to the intelligence of all, so that faith is by no means a blind impulse of the mind. The Church really does argue from miracles.
- **CCC 548:** Christ's miracles strengthen faith and bear witness that he is the Son of God, but they can also be occasions for offense, and they are not intended to satisfy people's curiosity or desire for magic. Both halves in one paragraph: tonight's whole session.
- **CCC 549:** Christ did not come to abolish all earthly evils here below by his signs, but to free men from the gravest slavery, sin. The signs point past themselves.

SESSION GOALS

1. State the one-big-miracle objection at full strength, including the psychology it assumes.
2. Let the group discover the wilderness data: maximum signs, persistent unbelief, in God's own summary.
3. Let the group discover that the raising of Lazarus produced both faith and a murder plot, and hear Luke 16:31's verdict.
4. Hold the balance: miracles are real motives of credibility, and no sign is will-proof, because God refuses coercion.

TIME NOTE

Runs 75 to 90 minutes as written. If short: cut the Matthew 16:1-4 discovery, folding the sign of Jonah into the Lazarus answer, then trim the Dig Deeper. Do not cut Numbers 14, John 11 to 12, or Luke 16.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays: Lord, you worked signs and wept over cities that watched them unmoved. Give us honesty tonight about what we are really asking for when we ask you for proof, and give us the eyes Augustine prayed for: awake to the standing miracle we live inside. Amen.

WIN

5. What is the closest thing to a miracle you have ever witnessed or heard about firsthand? What did it change, and for how long?
6. Be honest: if something undeniable happened tonight, right here, what do you predict you would believe about it in five years?

BUILD

Leader, present the objection at full strength. Read slowly: If God wanted the world to believe, one miracle would do it: public, undeniable, filmed from every angle. Every phone on earth, one sky, one voice. No one could doubt again. He has not done it. The silence where that sign should be is itself the evidence.

- 3. Before we test it: what does this objection assume about human beings and evidence? Spell out the psychology it needs to be true.

ANSWER. SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION.

Draw it out: the objection assumes we are neutral processors, that a big enough sign compels belief, and that compelled belief becomes trust and love. Reasonable-sounding assumptions, and testable: Scripture happens to contain the experiment, run at full scale, twice. Tonight we read the lab results.

Live discovery. Find Numbers 14:11. For context, remind the group what this generation had personally witnessed: ten plagues, the parted sea, Sinai in fire, daily manna. Read the verse aloud.

- 4. This is God's own summary of the most sign-saturated generation in history. What does he say, and what does it do to the objection's psychology?

ANSWER. SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION.

"How long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs which I have wrought among them?" (Numbers 14:11). Maximum evidence, sustained daily, did not produce durable trust; the golden calf went up within weeks of Sinai itself (Exodus 32). Signs were seen, believed for an afternoon, and metabolized into the background. The objection's psychology fails its own historical test case: spectacle does not install trust, because trust was never only an evidence problem.

Live discovery. Find John 11:38-45, the raising of Lazarus, then 11:46-53, and then John 12:9-11. Read them aloud.

- 5. Lazarus is a public sign with witnesses: dead four days by the text's own count, called out alive before a crowd. What are the two recorded responses?

ANSWER. SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION.

Many believed; and the authorities convened a council and resolved to kill Jesus, and then to kill Lazarus too, because the evidence kept converting people (John 12:10). Sit with that: a man raised

from the dead produced a murder conspiracy against the living proof. When the will has reasons to refuse, evidence does not compel it; it gets treated as a threat. The undeniable public miracle the objection asks for already has a case file, and the file contains a plot to destroy the exhibit. (Note the Catholic precision: Lazarus was restored to mortal life; the Resurrection, Christ's glorified and definitive rising, is another order of event.)

Live discovery. Find Luke 16:27-31, the end of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Read it aloud.

- 6. The rich man proposes exactly tonight's objection: send someone back from the dead, that will convince my brothers. What is the answer he receives?

ANSWER. SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION.

"If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31). Jesus's verdict on sign-demand psychology, delivered in a parable; and Christians have always heard its post-Resurrection edge: someone did rise from the dead, and the world's mixed response gave the sentence its force. A heart closed to the speech God has already given is not opened by volume. The problem was never decibels.

Reason, then the Church's balance. Now hold both halves, because the Church holds both. She stakes real weight on miracles: the Resurrection is her central claim, CCC 156 calls miracles most certain signs of Revelation, and she still convenes medical boards at Lourdes because evidence genuinely matters. And she teaches, in the same breath (CCC 548), that Christ's signs invite belief, can give offense, and are not meant to satisfy curiosity or the desire for magic. The resolution is the one the core study established: God's evidence is a lover's evidence. It invites a free heart; it will not steamroll one, because, as St. Irenaeus put it, there is no coercion with God, and, as St. Thomas observed, even the demons believe, and without charity it saves them nothing. The sign engineered to make intellectual refusal impossible could still not produce a single act of love. It would produce a world of demons: correct, compelled, and cold.

- 7. If God's goal were merely your assent, spectacle would do. If his goal is your love, what kind of signs would you expect him to give instead? Do those match what you have actually encountered?

ANSWER. SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION.

Draw out: signs legible to the seeking, deniable by the determined: a creation that whispers rather than shouts, a Resurrection attested by witnesses rather than broadcast from the sky, a Presence veiled in bread. Exactly the texture believers report and skeptics complain of, and exactly what a love-seeking God predicts. This does not prove the claim; it dissolves the objection's force, because the absence of a coercive sign is only evidence against a God who would coerce.

DIG DEEPER

If time allows: Matthew 16:1-4, where sign-demanders are refused everything except *"the sign of Jonah,"* read by Christians as prefiguring Christ's Resurrection: the great sign, given, and still refusable. And Judges 6:36-40, Gideon's fleece: an honest asker in a dark hour, answered twice with patience. Gideon himself calls it testing (6:39), and God bears with him; as a pastoral application, we might distinguish the trembling asker from the defiant demander, and deal gently with the first.

SEND

7. Which are you, honestly: the trembler who once begged for a sign, or the tester holding out for compulsion? What would each need to do next?
8. Augustine says we sleep inside a standing miracle. What is one constant thing, daylight, a heartbeat, a person, you could practice noticing this week as if for the first time?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Once a day, name one ordinary standing miracle out loud or on paper: something constant you have stopped seeing. Wonder is a discipline before it is a feeling.
- If you have ever prayed for a sign and gotten silence, tell God, honestly, what that did to you. That conversation is overdue and he can bear it.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” John 20:29

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader prays: Lord Jesus, you gave the sign of Jonah once for all, and you still refuse to compel a single heart. Wake us to the standing miracles, be patient with our fleeces, and when you knock quietly instead of thundering, give us the wit to know why. Amen.

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this deep-dive, in order of appearance. All quotations RSV2CE.

- **Numbers 14:11** God's summary of sign-saturated unbelief (live discovery; do not cut); Exodus 32 context
- **John 11:38-45; 11:46-53; 12:9-11** Lazarus raised: belief and a murder plot against the living proof (live discovery; do not cut)
- **Luke 16:27-31** neither will they be convinced (live discovery; do not cut)
- **Matthew 16:1-4** the sign of Jonah (Dig Deeper; first cut, folded into Lazarus answer)
- **Judges 6:36-40** Gideon's fleece: patience with the honest asker (Dig Deeper)
- **John 20:29** memory verse; callback to the core study's Thomas session where applicable
- **Psalms 78; 95** Israel preaching the wilderness lesson to itself (leader background)

Catechism: CCC 156; 548; 549.

Voices: St. Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John (summary); St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 5 (summary); St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book IV (summary).