

Session 3: Show Us the Father

A study for seekers and the friends who walk with them

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group discovers that the demand behind this whole study, God should speak to us directly, is answered by Scripture from two directions: Sinai, where direct divine speech was offered and the people begged for mediation, and the Last Supper, where Philip asked the demand outright, in words strikingly close to the sealed sentences the group has been carrying. And they discover the answer Jesus gave.

Catholic Touchstone: In many and various ways God spoke of old by the prophets; in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, and in giving us his Son, his one definitive Word, he has said everything at once (CCC 65).

HOSTING YOUR SEEKER FRIEND

Tonight the sealed envelopes open. Handle it with care:

- Each person opens and reads their own guess silently. No one shares aloud unless they volunteer, and do not go around the circle. The moment is between each person and the text they are about to meet.
- Do not oversell the reveal. Let John 14:8 be read cold and let the room notice on its own that Philip asked their question. If the silence gets long, let it.
- Your seeker friend may feel exposed tonight, in a good way or a hard way. Check in with them personally afterward, one on one, not in front of the group.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This is the hinge of the study. The objection it answers is the study's founding question: if the stakes are what Christians say they are, God should speak to us directly, and a two-thousand-year-old speaking can feel like no speaking at all. Tonight's texts complicate that demand from two directions, and then meet it.

First direction: humanity has heard something close to unmediated divine speech, once, at Sinai, and the recorded response is not satisfaction but terror. The people beg Moses to mediate: speak to us yourself, but do not let God speak to us. Session 1 planted this (the refusal of Moses's request as protection); tonight it becomes the people's own request. The demand for directness, granted, turned immediately into a plea for distance.

Second direction: the Incarnation is the Christian claim that God did what the objection demands, in the only register a human being can survive and understand: he spoke as one of us. Hebrews 1:1-2 frames all prior revelation as prologue to this, and John 14:8-9 records the demand in its purest form, from an apostle: show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied. Jesus's reply is the study's title turned around: he who has seen me has seen the Father. Whether to trust that reply is a further question (and the seeker's live question in its sharpest form, not whether God spoke directly to humanity but whether he has spoken to me, is the business of the rest of the study; do not pretend tonight closes it). But the demand itself cannot be said to have gone unanswered.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The Sinai theophany (Exodus 19-20) is the Old Testament's summit of direct divine speech: fire, cloud, trumpet, and the people trembling at a distance. Their plea for a mediator becomes, in the Old Testament's own arc, the office of prophet: Deuteronomy 18:15-18 promises a prophet like Moses, raised from among the people, into whose mouth God will put his words. The New Testament reads that arc as converging on Christ: the Word who was with God becomes flesh and dwells among us (John 1:1, 14), the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). The hiddenness texts of Session 1 and the mediated speech of Sinai are not the story's end; they are its setup.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

Writing on the road to his martyrdom around the year 107, St. Ignatius teaches in his *Letter to the Magnesians* that there is one God, who manifested himself through Jesus Christ his Son. In the reading printed by the standard critical editions, St. Ignatius calls the Son God's Word proceeding from silence (leaders: the phrase carries an ancient textual variant, and some copies read the reverse; the manifestation teaching itself is undisputed). Taken in the critical text, the image is the session in one line: the silence the seeker complains of is real, and the Christian claim is that a Word came out of it, once, decisively, in the flesh.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS

St. Irenaeus, in *Against Heresies* (Book IV.20.7), teaches that the glory of God is the living human being, and the life of the human being is the vision of God. For St. Irenaeus the Son is precisely how the invisible Father becomes seeable without destroying the seer: what Moses was denied at the cleft of the rock is given, humanly, in Christ.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. ATHANASIUS

St. Athanasius teaches, in substance, in *On the Incarnation* that the Word took a visible body so that those who could not lift their eyes to invisible things might know the Father through his works in the flesh. God stooped to the register we could read. The Incarnation, for St. Athanasius, is not God shouting louder; it is God translating himself.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 65:** Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father's one, perfect, and unsurpassable Word. The paragraph itself quotes St. John of the Cross: in giving us his Son, God spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word, and he has no more to say. Note for your own precision: the saying is St. John of the Cross (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*), quoted by the Catechism at this paragraph. It also closes a circle for your group: the saint who cried, where have you hidden, in Session 1 is the same saint the Church quotes on God having spoken everything.
- **CCC 73:** God has revealed himself fully by sending his own Son, in whom he has established his covenant for ever; the Son is his Father's definitive Word.
- **CCC 516:** Christ's whole earthly life, his words and deeds, his silences and sufferings, is Revelation of the Father.

THREAD WATCH

The sealed guess resolves tonight: envelopes open just before the John 14 discovery, exactly as scripted in the Discussion Guide. The study's main thread, God has a pattern of speaking, takes its biggest step (creation, prophets, and now the Son) but does not resolve: the seeker's live question, how does a Word

spoken then reach me now, is named aloud tonight and deliberately left open. It resolves in Session 6. Do not resolve it early.

SESSION GOALS

1. Let the group discover that divine speech without a human mediator was offered at Sinai and that the people themselves asked for mediation.
2. Open the sealed guesses and let John 14:8 land as the group's own question, already asked.
3. Present the Incarnation as God's direct speech in a human register, per Hebrews 1:1-2.
4. Name, without resolving, the remaining question: how that Word reaches us now.

TIME NOTE

Runs 75 to 90 minutes as written. If short: cut the Colossians 1:15 discovery first, then reduce Win to a single question. Do not cut Sinai, the envelope opening, or John 14.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays: God, three weeks ago we told you, sealed in ink, what it would take. Tonight we ask only this: whatever you have already said, help us hear it as if for the first time. Amen.

WIN

5. Have you ever known someone only through letters, messages, or someone else's stories, and then met them in person? What changed?
6. If you could ask God one question face to face, and had to survive the meeting, what would you ask?

BUILD

Leader, restate the founding objection at full strength. This whole study began here: if heaven and hell are real, a loving God would not whisper through old books. He would speak directly. Tonight we test that demand against Sinai, where something like it was granted, and against the one time Scripture records it asked outright.

Live discovery. Find Exodus 20:18-19, just after the Ten Commandments are spoken. Read it aloud.

- 3. God is speaking as directly as he ever speaks in the Old Testament. What do the people ask for, in their own words?

ANSWER. SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION.

They ask for mediation: *"You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die"* (Exodus 20:19). The one time the demand for direct divine speech was granted, the hearers begged for distance. This is Session 1's discovery from the other side: there, God shields Moses for his protection; here, the people plead for the shield themselves. The demand for directness assumes directness would be bearable. Sinai is the Bible's evidence that it is not, for creatures like us, yet.

- 4. Honest question for everyone: when you imagine God speaking to you directly, are you imagining something comfortable? Should you be?

ANSWER. SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION.

Let this breathe; it is a heart question, not a trick. Draw out: most of us imagine direct divine speech as reassurance, but the great theophanies, Sinai, Isaiah in the temple, the Transfiguration, produce awe and fear before they produce comfort. Wanting God at full volume may be wanting something we could not stand.

The envelopes. Pause the study. Hand each person their sealed guess from Session 1. Each person opens it and rereads, silently, what they wrote: what would it take for you to believe? No sharing aloud unless someone volunteers. Then say only this: someone in Scripture asked a question strikingly close to yours, and we are about to read him.

Live discovery. Find John 14:8-9. Read it aloud, slowly.

- 5. What does Philip ask for? What does he say it would accomplish?

ANSWER. SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION.

"Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied" (John 14:8). Philip's request is this study's title and, for many in the room, a striking parallel to the sealed sentence they are holding: show us,

directly, and that will settle it. He is not a skeptic; he is an apostle, at the Last Supper, and Jesus receives the request even as he gently chides the not-yet-seeing: Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip?

- 6. And what is Jesus's answer?

ANSWER. SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION.

"He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). The claim is staggering: the direct sight Philip wants has been standing in front of him at the dinner table. Not a vision that kills, not fire on a mountain: a face, a voice, a friend. Whether to believe that claim is a real and further question; but notice what can no longer be said: that the demand went unheard. It was asked by an apostle and answered by Christ.

Live discovery. Find Hebrews 1:1-2. Read it aloud.

- 7. How does this text organize everything God has ever said?

ANSWER. SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION.

"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2). Hebrews names the prophets; the Church reads all earlier revelation, including the creation-speech our sessions traced, as preparation fulfilled here. The Son is not one more message; he is the Speaker arriving in person, in the only register human beings can bear: a human life. The Incarnation is the Christian answer to, why does God not speak directly: he did, and the speech has a name.

Name the live question, then leave it open. Say plainly: the honest comeback is obvious, and some of you are thinking it: that was then. Philip got a face; I got a book. Notice the question has just sharpened into its final form: not, has God spoken directly to humanity, but, has he spoken to ME. How a Word spoken then reaches this person now is a real question, and this study is not going to rush the answer. Hold it in that exact form. It is precisely where we are headed.

DIG DEEPER

If time allows: John 1:14, *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth,"* with John 1:18 alongside it: no one has ever seen God, and the Son has made him known. And Colossians 1:15 names Christ *"the image of the invisible God."* The vocabulary of Session 1, invisible, unseen, hidden, is all still here; the claim is that it now has a face.

SEND

7. Reread your unsealed sentence one more time, privately. Does what you wrote look different on the far side of tonight, or the same? You do not have to say which.
8. If it were true that to see Jesus is to see the Father, what would be the first thing about God you would have to revise?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Read one chapter of a Gospel this week, any chapter, with a single question in mind: if Jesus, the incarnate Son, perfectly reveals the Father, what is the Father like?

- Keep your unsealed guess somewhere you will see it. The study is not done with it, and neither, perhaps, is God.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“He who has seen me has seen the Father.” John 14:9

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader prays: Father, we asked you to show yourself, and the Church's answer is a name: Jesus. For those of us who believe it, make the seeing sharper. For those of us who cannot yet, honor the sentence they sealed, and meet them in the asking, as you met Philip. Amen.

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 3, in order of appearance. All quotations RSV2CE.

- **Exodus 20:18-19** the people beg for mediation at Sinai (live discovery; do not cut)
- **John 14:8-9** Philip's request and Christ's answer (live discovery; envelopes open just before; memory verse; do not cut)
- **Hebrews 1:1-2** God has spoken by a Son (live discovery)
- **John 1:14, 18** the Word became flesh; the Son has made him known (Dig Deeper)
- **Colossians 1:15** the image of the invisible God (Dig Deeper; first cut if short)
- **Deuteronomy 18:15-18** the promised prophet like Moses (leader background, OT Roots)

Catechism: CCC 65 (quoting St. John of the Cross, Ascent of Mount Carmel); 73; 516.

Voices: St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Magnesians; St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies IV.20.7; St. Athanasius, On the Incarnation (summary).