

TODAY

A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Luke

SESSION 4

Put Out Into the Deep

Luke 5–6

Four calls, a hole in a roof, and the Sermon on the Plain

Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that Simon Peter's collapse in the boat follows an exact biblical pattern, Isaiah's own call: the presence of the Holy, the cry of unworthiness, the reassurance, the commission. They then watch Jesus claim a power the scribes rightly say belongs to God alone, and hear Luke's version of the great sermon, blessings paired with woes.

Catholic Touchstone: The forgiveness of sins as divine power that Christ exercises and, scandalously, hands on (CCC 1441–1445, the very paragraphs that quote tonight's scribes); the Twelve as the foundation of the new Israel; and the barque of Peter as the Fathers' image of the Church.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The catch of fish (5:1–11) is Luke's vocation masterpiece. Jesus borrows Simon's boat as a pulpit, then tells a professional fisherman who has worked all night for nothing to put out into the deep and lower the nets. The catch that follows breaks the nets and nearly sinks two boats, and Simon's response is the tell: not excitement but terror. Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. That sequence, glory revealed, sinfulness confessed, fear relieved, mission given, is the standard grammar of a prophetic call, and tonight's live discovery sends the group to Isaiah 6 to find the same four beats: the Lord high and lifted up, woe is me, a man of unclean lips, the coal that takes guilt away, whom shall I send. Simon has just had an Isaiah 6 experience in a fishing boat, which means he has just intuited who is sitting in his boat. Jesus' reply gives fear a new job: do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men. They leave everything, a phrase Luke will use again for Levi, and follow.

The paralytic (5:17–26) turns on a sentence the scribes get exactly right: who can forgive sins but God alone? Sins, as offenses against God, can be absolved by no mere creature, and Jesus does not correct the premise; he demonstrates the conclusion. So that you may know the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins, he heals the visible paralysis to prove the invisible absolution. The Catechism quotes this very verse and then takes the step that startles: Christ willed that his Church should continue this work of forgiveness, entrusting the power of absolution to men (CCC 1441–1445; see Jn 20:23). Every confessional stands on this rooftop story. Note also who carried the man: Jesus saw their faith, a faith that includes the friends who carried him, and forgave him. Intercession is load-bearing in Luke.

Levi's call (5:27–32) extends grace to a tax collector, a collaborator, and the celebration dinner that follows is the first of Luke's great meals; note the pattern beginning, because Luke's Gospel eats its way to Jerusalem, and the meals are the theology. The grumbling starts immediately: this man receives sinners and eats with them. Jesus' answer names his vocation with a physician's image Luke must have loved: those who are well have no need of a physician. Then, after a night spent in prayer on the mountain, Jesus chooses twelve from among the disciples and names them apostles. The number is not decoration: twelve tribes, twelve patriarchs, and now twelve foundations of a reconstituted Israel. Luke flags the prayer before every hinge of this Gospel; start pointing it out.

The Sermon on the Plain (6:17–49) is Luke's counterpart to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, shorter, on level ground, and sharpened. Luke's beatitudes are blunt: blessed are you poor, you that hunger now,

you that weep now. And Luke alone pairs them with woes: woe to you that are rich, that are full, that laugh now. Tonight's steelman takes seriously the claim that Matthew spiritualized what Luke kept raw, or that Luke preaches mere economics. The honest answer holds both: Luke's poor are the anawim of the Magnificat, materially poor and clinging to God, and the woes are not a damnation of bank balances but the Magnificat's reversal spoken in the second person, a warning that consolation taken in full now leaves nothing to inherit. The sermon then runs to the commands that have no parallel in any ancient ethic: love your enemies, bless those who curse you, be merciful even as your Father is merciful, and closes with two houses, one dug down to rock. Hearing without doing, Luke's Jesus says, is a house built on the ground without a foundation; Mary, who heard the word and kept it, has already shown the group what the rock looks like.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Isa 6:1–8 Glory, unworthiness, reassurance, commission: the call pattern – **Lk 5:1–11**

Ps 103:2–3, Isa 43:25 The Lord who forgives all your iniquity, God alone blots out sins – **Lk 5:21**

Gen 49 / Num 1 Twelve tribes, twelve patriarchs: the shape of Israel – **Lk 6:12–16**

Isa 61:1–2 Good news to the poor: the Nazareth scroll behind the beatitudes – **Lk 6:20**

Jer 17:24–27 with Ex 20:8–11 The sabbath command and its purpose – **Lk 6:1–11**

Lev 19:18 pressed further Love of neighbor stretched to love of enemy – **Lk 6:27–36**

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Ambrose of Milan (*Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke, Book IV*)

Ambrose reads Simon's boat as the Church: Christ teaches from Peter's barque, commands it into deep water, and fills its nets past breaking. The other boats are called to help because the catch is too great for one crew, yet it is Peter's boat the Lord chooses to sit in, and Peter's nets, torn but not lost, that hold a multitude no one expected.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Alexandria (*Commentary on Luke, on the paralytic*)

Cyril fixes on the scribes' own logic: they said truly that none can forgive sins except God alone, and the Lord accepted their premise. By healing the body at a word to prove the soul had been absolved, he demonstrated that the one they took for mere man wields the very authority they reserved to God, so that the miracle is an argument, and the argument is his divinity.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (*Sermons on the New Testament, on the two foundations*)

Preaching on the house built on rock, Augustine insists that hearing the word is the beginning and not the building: the man who hears and does not do erects his life on sand that waits for weather.

To dig deep, he says, is to let the word cut past feelings and opinions until it reaches Christ the rock, for the storm is not a possibility but a schedule, and only what is founded on him will still be standing when the water recedes.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 1441–1445 Only God forgives sins; Christ exercises and confers this divine power. Tonight's scribes are quoted in 1441.

CCC 858–860 The Twelve: called by Jesus and sent as the Father sent the Son, their office handed on to successors. The night of prayer is Luke 6:12; for the Twelve as representing the twelve tribes of Israel, see CCC 765.

CCC 2600 Luke shows Jesus praying before the decisive moments of his mission and of his apostles' mission, the filial prayer the disciples are drawn into.

CCC 2544–2547 Poverty of heart: the beatitude of the poor, the peril of riches, blessed dependence on God.

THREAD WATCH

Meals with sinners (PLANTS TONIGHT, develops throughout, resolves Sessions 13–14): Levi's banquet at 5:29 is the first course of Luke's table theology. Start the tally aloud: who does Jesus eat with, and who complains? The table is heading somewhere, an upper room and a roadside inn at Emmaus.

Prayer before the hinge (plants tonight): 6:12, all night in prayer before choosing the Twelve. Luke shows Jesus praying at every turning point: baptism, this choice, the confession, the Transfiguration, Gethsemane. Name it once tonight and keep pointing.

Blessed outsiders (develops): A tax collector joins the inner circle. The Nazareth pattern continues.

Overshadow (SEALED, resolves Session 6): Next session. Guard it one more week; if anyone asks, smile.

SESSION GOALS

1. Run the Isaiah 6 discovery live: the group maps Simon's boat onto the prophet's call and names what the parallel implies about Jesus.
2. Work the paralytic as the Catechism does: the scribes' premise granted, the divine power demonstrated, and the shocking hand-off to the Church.
3. Establish the meals thread at Levi's table and the physician saying as Luke's mission statement.
4. See the Twelve as the reconstitution of Israel, chosen after a night of prayer.
5. Face the poor versus poor in spirit steelman honestly and let the woes land as the Magnificat in the second person.

Time Note (75–90 minutes)

Two full chapters tonight; be disciplined. If pressed, treat the sabbath controversies (6:1–11) in one summary sentence and drop both Dig Deeper boxes. Never cut Question 1 and its discovery (Isaiah 6) or Question 3 (the paralytic); if the sermon discussion runs deep, let the two-houses close (Q6) become the closing prayer's on-ramp. This session has a natural split point after Question 4 if your group ever runs a makeup night.

Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord Jesus, you stepped into a working man's boat and turned his failure into a calling. Step into what we bring tonight, the empty nets and the long nights, and speak the word that fills them. Give us Simon's honesty about our sins and his readiness to leave everything, and make us merciful as your Father is merciful. Amen.*

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS (10 MIN)

W1. Have you ever succeeded at something right after being completely sure it was hopeless? What changed?

W2. Who is the most unlikely friend you have ever made, someone nobody would have predicted you would share a table with?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT (50–60 MIN)

HOW TO LEAD THIS SECTION

Open with the boat and give the Isaiah discovery room to breathe. Keep the middle questions moving; the sermon needs twenty minutes at the end. Ask, wait, consolidate with the ANSWER boxes only after they have dug.

1. Read Luke 5:1–11. Simon has fished all night and caught nothing, and he is a professional. What does it cost him to say nevertheless at your word I will let down the nets? And when the nets fill, why is his reaction fear rather than joy?

Leader: *Let them feel the professional humiliation of the command and the strangeness of falling at someone's knees over fish.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Obedying costs Simon his expertise: the carpenter's son is telling the fisherman where the fish are, in daylight, in deep water, after a failed night. His nevertheless is the first act of faith in the boat. And when the catch breaks the nets, Simon does the math no one taught him: abundance like this is not luck, it is presence, and sinful men do not survive the presence of the Holy. Depart from me is not modesty; it is theology. He has just realized what is sitting in his boat.

2. Live discovery: Simon's reaction follows an exact biblical script. Find Isaiah 6:1–8 and read it as a group. Map the beats of Isaiah's call onto Luke 5: what happens first, what does each man cry out, what is each told, and what is each given to do?

Leader: *The four beats: glory revealed (the Lord on the throne / the impossible catch), unworthiness confessed (woe is me, unclean lips / depart from me, a sinful man), fear relieved (the coal, your guilt is taken away / do not be afraid), commission given (whom shall I send / you will be catching men). Let them build the table.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Beat for beat, Simon's boat is Isaiah's temple: glory breaks in, the man confesses his sin, God relieves the fear, and a mission is given. The pattern is the standard grammar of a prophetic call, and Luke's point rides on the casting: in Isaiah 6 the glory belongs to the Lord of hosts; in Luke 5 it belongs to the man in the boat. Simon's knees have worked out Christology before his mouth can. Notice too that the call does not erase his sinfulness, it repurposes it: the sinful man becomes the fisher of men, and the boat, as St. Ambrose loved to say, becomes the Church, nets straining but never lost, with room for other boats when the catch is too big for one crew.

3. Read Luke 5:17–26. The scribes object: who can forgive sins but God alone? Is their theology wrong? And what exactly does the healing prove, according to Jesus' own words in verse 24?

Leader: Grant the scribes their premise; it is correct. Then follow the syllogism where it goes. CCC 1441 is in the answer if the group wants the Church's words.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The scribes' premise is perfectly sound, and the Catechism agrees with them: only God forgives sins, because sin is an offense against God (CCC 1441). Jesus never disputes it. Instead he supplies the minor premise in public: the invisible claim (your sins are forgiven) is verified by the visible impossibility (rise and walk), so that you may know the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins. Grant the scribes' theology and watch the healed man carry his bed, and the conclusion walks out the door with him. And the scandal has a second act: the risen Christ breathes this same authority onto men (Jn 20:22–23), which is why the Church has confessors at all (CCC 1441–1445). Every absolution ever spoken stands on this rooftop. Notice, finally, what Jesus saw: their faith, the faith of the men at the ropes and perhaps the man's own with it. Luke believes in carried people.

4. Read Luke 5:27–32. Levi leaves everything, and his first act as a disciple is to throw a banquet. Who is at the table, who is grumbling at the edge of the room, and how does Jesus' physician saying answer them?

Leader: Establish the meal pattern out loud: this is the first of many tables in Luke, and the guest list is the offense every time.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

A tax collector, a collaborator with Rome skimming his neighbors, is called with one word and answers like the fishermen: he left everything. His banquet fills with his only friends, other tax collectors and sinners, and the Pharisees ask the question that will chase Jesus to the cross: why do you eat with them? The physician saying is the mission statement of this whole Gospel: those who are well have no need of a physician. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Mark the table well; Luke's Jesus eats his way through this Gospel, and every meal is doctrine. The guest list at Levi's house is the first draft of the guest list at every Mass.

5. Read Luke 6:12–16 and then 6:17–26. First: what does Jesus do all night before choosing the Twelve, and why twelve? Then the sermon: **steelman chain**: Luke says blessed are you poor where Matthew

says poor in spirit, and Luke alone adds woes to the rich, the full, and the laughing. The strong objection cuts both ways: either Matthew softened Jesus into spirituality, or Luke flattened him into economics. Give both readings their full force, then test them against the Magnificat and against who the anawim were.

Leader: Two-part question; take the Twelve quickly and spend the time on the beatitudes and woes.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Jesus spends the whole night in prayer, Luke's signal before every hinge, and chooses twelve: not a round number but a rebuilt Israel, twelve foundations answering twelve tribes, the patriarchs of the new people of God (CCC 858–860). As for the steelman: both accusations fail because both halves are true. Luke's poor are the *anawim* his Gospel has sung about since the Magnificat: materially poor and, in that poverty, clinging to God with their whole weight, the widow with two coins, the beggar at the gate. Matthew names the disposition; Luke refuses to let the disposition float free of actual money, actual hunger, actual tears. And the woes are not a damnation of wealth but the Magnificat conjugated in the second person: you that are rich have received your consolation, the same verb a paid receipt uses. Take your comfort in full now, and there is nothing left on account. Luke will spend three more parables making this exact point, one of them featuring a rich man and a beggar we meet in Session 10.

DIG DEEPER: LORD OF THE SABBATH

The two sabbath controversies (6:1–11) turn on a claim hiding in plain sight: the Son of man is lord of the sabbath. The sabbath is God's own institution from creation week; announcing lordship over it is not a liberal opinion about rules, it is a divine claim, of a piece with forgiving sins. Notice the pattern building: Luke's Jesus keeps exercising prerogatives Israel reserved to God, and the authorities are not wrong to notice. They are wrong about what follows.

6. Read Luke 6:27–38 and 6:46–49. Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, be merciful even as your Father is merciful, and then the two houses. What is the difference between the builders, according to Jesus? And who, in this Gospel so far, has already modeled hearing the word and doing it?

Leader: Land the sermon on obedience, and let the group find their way back to 1:38.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The builders differ in one verb: both hear, one does. The house dug down to rock survives the flood that is coming for every house; the storm in this parable is not hypothetical weather but a schedule, as St. Augustine put it. And the group has already met the master builder: a girl in Nazareth who heard the most impossible word ever spoken and answered let it be to me according to your word, then kept and pondered everything she could not understand. Luke's Gospel of mercy has a spine of obedience, and the standard is the Father himself: be merciful, even as your Father is merciful, which next week a Roman centurion and a weeping woman will illustrate better than anyone expects.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT (10 MIN)

S1. Where in your life right now is Jesus saying put out into the deep, asking you to try again, at his word, in the exact place you have already failed?

S2. The paralytic got to Jesus because his friends refused to give up. Who are you carrying right now, and who carried you? Say one name out loud if you are willing.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Go to Confession this week if you can. Tonight's rooftop is why the sacrament exists; kneel where the paralytic lay.
- Pray by name, once a day, for the one person you would least like to bless. That is the sermon's assignment, not the study's.
- Before next session, read Luke 7:1–8:56: a centurion's word we say at every Mass, a widow's son, a weeping woman, and a storm.

Scripture memory: **Luke 6:36**, *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.* (RSV2CE)

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Father, your Son called sinners from boats and tax booths and made them the foundations of your Church. Forgive our sins as only you can, teach us to carry one another to you, and dig our lives down to the rock. Make us merciful, Lord, even as you are merciful. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Leader Reference Card: Session 4

Every passage used tonight, in order of appearance. Isaiah 6 is the load-bearing bookmark.

Passage Used for

Luke 5:1–11 Q1-Q2: the catch and the call

Isaiah 6:1–8 Q2 live discovery: the call pattern

Luke 5:17–26 Q3: the paralytic; scribes quoted in CCC 1441

John 20:22–23 Q3: the authority handed on

Luke 5:27–32 Q4: Levi's banquet, the physician saying

Luke 6:1–11 Dig Deeper: lord of the sabbath

Luke 6:12–16 Q5: night of prayer, the Twelve

Luke 6:17–26 Q5 steelman: beatitudes and woes

Luke 6:27–38 Q6: love of enemies, merciful as the Father

Luke 6:46–49 Q6: the two houses

CCC 1441–1445, 858–860, 2600, 2544–2547 Catechism Connection

Next week: Luke 7–8. Bookmark 1 Kings 17; a funeral procession outside a town called Nain is going to look very familiar to anyone who knows Elijah, and the group should make the connection themselves.