

What Do You Seek?

Deep-Dive: Stay with Us (The Road to Emmaus)

A standalone session: any group, any order

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: The group discovers the risen Jesus walking unrecognized beside two people whose hope is in the past tense, drawing out their grief with questions before He explains anything, opening the scriptures until their hearts burn, and, at the decisive threshold, appearing to be going further until they freely ask Him in: stay with us.

Catholic Touchstone: The Mass has walked this road ever since: He explained the Scriptures to them on the way, and was known to them in the breaking of the bread (CCC 1347).

The Knock in This Encounter (leader only)

This session is the free-will frame at its most explicit anywhere in the Gospels: “He appeared to be going further” (Lk 24:28). The risen Lord, having walked seven miles beside them and set their hearts on fire, will keep walking into the dusk unless He is asked to stay, and everything turns on their “Stay with us.” The door is opened from the inside, freely, and only then is He known. **Spoiler discipline:** if your group has not finished the six core sessions, keep this framing leader-only; if they have, verse 28 will detonate on its own. Let it.

What You Need to Know

Easter afternoon, and two disciples are walking the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, which is to say, away: away from the city, the community, and the wreckage of the weekend. One is named Cleopas; the other is never named, which generations of readers have taken as an open seat. Their condition is stated in the most seeker-recognizable sentence in Luke: “But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (24:21). Had hoped: hope in the past tense. Everyone at your table has conjugated that verb about something.

“Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (24:15-16). Note what the risen Lord does with His first afternoon: not a throne room, not a demonstration over Pilate’s palace, but seven anonymous miles beside two nobodies leaving town in the wrong direction. And note His method, because it is this study’s method: He asks. “What is this conversation?” He, of all people, does not need the answer; He needs them to say it, and He absorbs the small comedy of Cleopas explaining the crucifixion to the crucified: “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know...?” (24:18). Grief must be drawn out before it can be addressed; the risen Christ listens to the whole story of His own death before He says a word of interpretation.

Then the Bible study: “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (24:25-27). The rebuke is for slowness to believe the prophets, not for grief; and the claim underneath is enormous: the whole Old Testament, rightly read, concerns Him. Luke does not give us

the syllabus of that seven-mile seminar, so the session recreates a sample live, in Psalm 22, and lets the group feel a flicker of what made their hearts burn (24:32).

The threshold, verse 28, is the scene's hinge and this study's crown jewel: "He appeared to be going further." No bluff and no game: He will not invite Himself where He is not asked; the same courtesy that governed every encounter governs the risen Lord. "But they constrained him, saying, 'Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent'" (24:29). Only inside, at their table, does the guest become the host: "he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight" (24:30-31). Recognized in the breaking of the bread, and no longer needing to be seen across the table, because He has just shown them where He will above all be found from now on. The Church has read her own Mass in this structure from the beginning, and the Catechism says so in almost these words (CCC 1347): the Scriptures opened on the way, the bread broken at the table. Say it plainly to seekers: every Mass is this road, run in order, every week.

The ending is kinetic: "they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem" (24:33), seven miles back, into the night, to say what they now knew. Dead hope walks away from Jerusalem; met hope runs back toward it. The direction of a person's feet is Luke's last piece of evidence.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalm 22:1, 16-18. The live discovery, run as a miniature Emmaus: the psalm that opens with the very words Jesus prayed from the cross goes on, centuries before crucifixion existed as a Roman practice, to describe pierced hands and feet, the stares of a crowd, and garments divided by lot. The group reads it cold and reacts before the leader says anything.

Genesis 18:1-8 and Genesis 3:8-9. Leader background for the scene's deep grammar: the LORD received as a traveling guest at Abraham's tent, and the sound of God walking in the garden at the beginning, with man hiding from the voice that asked "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:8-9). Emmaus is the walking resumed.

Voices of the Church

St. Augustine *Sermons on Easter (summary)*

Augustine presses his congregation on the strange mercy of the hidden face: they possessed Christ beside them and did not know it, so that they would learn to find Him where He willed to be found. Where did the Lord choose to be recognized? In the breaking of the bread, Augustine answers, and adds the pastoral turn: whoever receives that bread with faith is not worse off than the two at Emmaus; the recognition is still on offer at the same table. A faithful summary of his Easter preaching.

St. Gregory the Great *Homilies on the Gospels (summary)*

Gregory fastens on the hospitality: the disciples did not recognize God in the explanation of Scripture, yet they came to know Him in the offering of a meal to a stranger. He draws the lesson without flinching: the Lord who is heard in His word chose to be known in an act of welcome; whoever would see Him must first set a table for someone. A faithful summary of Homily 23.

Pope St. John Paul II *Mane Nobiscum Domine (summary)*

John Paul II gave his last Year of the Eucharist the Emmaus disciples' own sentence as its title: stay with us, Lord. The whole Church, he wrote, is those two on the road: hearts slow, hopes bruised, joined by a

Companion whose word makes hearts burn and who is recognized in the breaking of bread; and the recognition sends her, that same hour, back toward the world with the news. A faithful summary of the apostolic letter.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1347:** the Eucharist unfolds on the pattern of this very meal: walking with them He explained the Scriptures; at table He took, blessed, broke, and gave.
- **CCC 1346:** the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist form one single act of worship: the road and the table are one event.
- **CCC 112:** the whole of Scripture is read rightly only in the light of Christ: the claim of verse 27, made doctrine.

Hosting Your Seeker Friend

This Week's Coaching

"We had hoped" may be your friend's exact tense: about God, about the Church, about a marriage, a diagnosis, a child. The stranger's method is your method tonight: draw the story out with questions and absorb all of it before explaining anything; the risen Christ listened to the account of His own death without interrupting, and you can listen to a disappointment without fixing it. Do not rush anyone's grief toward the happy ending of the passage. And the Mass bridge here is the strongest on the shelf, so make it concrete: if your friend ever sits through one Mass, they will watch this exact sequence, Scriptures opened, then bread taken, blessed, broken, given, and they should know the road came first, and that the sequence was designed for people whose hope was in the past tense.

Standalone Notes

- No dependencies: run before, during, or after the core, or alone. It is, however, the natural finale of the deep-dive shelf: the only post-Resurrection encounter, and the bridge to the Mass.
- The unnamed second disciple is a genuine feature of the text; the session uses the open seat lightly and does not build doctrine on it.
- If a reader asks where Emmaus was: the site is genuinely uncertain, with several candidates; say so plainly. The uncertainty of the village and the specificity of the road (sixty stadia, about seven miles) sit together comfortably in an honest account.

Session Goals

1. Let "we had hoped" be felt before it is fixed: the past tense of hope, named.
2. Show the method of the hidden Companion: questions first, the whole grief drawn out, Scripture opened only after listening.
3. Run the Psalm 22 discovery as a miniature of the seven-mile seminar.
4. Land verse 28 with full weight: He appeared to be going further; stay with us is freely spoken.
5. Name the Mass in the structure, plainly, and end on the direction of their feet.

Time Note

75 minutes of content in a 90-minute evening. If long: cut the Dig Deeper first, then trim Build question 2. Never cut verse 28 or the Psalm 22 discovery; the first is the study's frame at full power, and the second is the burn.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening

Leader prays alone, briefly. State the two rules if new faces are present: nobody gets called on; nobody's answer gets graded.

“God, some of the hope at this table is in the past tense. Walk with us anyway, the whole road, and let us decide about the door. Amen.”

Win

C. S. Lewis, after losing his wife, opened his rawest book with a sentence that has met many grievors where they are: “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear.” The most honest hopes are the ones grief has handled.

1. “We had hoped.” Everyone has conjugated that verb about something. Without forcing anyone's story, what kinds of things put hope into the past tense?
2. When you were at your lowest, what actually helped: the people who explained things to you, or the people who walked and listened first? Why?

Build

Read Luke 24:13-24 aloud.

1. Map the scene: who is walking, which direction relative to Jerusalem and the community, and in what condition? What does verse 21's “we had hoped” tell you that “we hoped” would not?
2. Verses 15-19: the risen Jesus draws near, unrecognized, and asks questions He does not need answered, then absorbs Cleopas's explanation of His own crucifixion. Why does He make them tell it? What is His method with grieving people?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Two disciples, one named Cleopas and one left unnamed, an open seat readers have noticed for centuries, walking away: from the city, the apostles, and the wreckage, on Easter afternoon of all afternoons. “We had hoped” is hope autopsied: it existed, it was specific, and it died on Friday; the perfect tense of every disappointed seeker. And the method of the hidden Companion is the session's quiet astonishment: He asks, He listens, He lets them narrate His own death to His face, small comedy included, because grief has to come all the way out before anything true can go in. The risen Lord's first recorded pastoral act is seven miles of listening.

Read Luke 24:25-27 aloud.

3. The rebuke lands on being “slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken,” and then He teaches the whole scriptures “concerning himself.” Luke does not tell us which passages He opened. Let's recover a likely one and read it the way they first heard it.

Live discovery: *have the group find Psalm 22 and read verses 1, 16, 17, and 18 aloud, slowly. Let the reactions come before you comment.*

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Psalm 22 opens with the very sentence Jesus prayed from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,” and then, written centuries before Rome made crucifixion its instrument, describes pierced hands and feet, bones on display, a staring crowd, and garments divided by casting lots: the mechanics of Good Friday, in Israel's hymnal, long in advance. Whatever the full syllabus of the seven-

mile seminar was, this psalm was almost certainly on it, and the group has just felt a flicker of verse 32 from the inside: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he opened to us the scriptures?” The claim of verse 27 is total: the whole Old Testament, rightly read, is about Him.

Read Luke 24:28-35 aloud.

4. Verse 28 may be the most delicate sentence in the Gospels: “He appeared to be going further.” After seven miles and burning hearts, He will walk on into the dark unless asked. Why? What does this tell you about how God treats a human threshold?
5. Only after “stay with us” is He known, and known in a specific gesture: took, blessed, broke, gave. What happens at that table, and why does He vanish the moment they recognize Him? Then look at verse 33: what do their feet do, and what does that prove?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Verse 28 is courtesy at divine scale: He has done everything except cross their threshold uninvited, and that one thing He will not do; the risen Lord with all authority in heaven and earth waits for two bruised travelers to say “stay with us,” and the whole scene turns on their freely saying it. Inside, the guest becomes host: the four verbs, took, blessed, broke, gave, are the verbs of the Last Supper, and their eyes open exactly there, in the breaking of the bread. He vanishes not to abandon them but because He has just shown them where He will above all be found from now on: the Church has read her Mass in this structure from the beginning, Scriptures opened on the road, bread broken at the table, one single act (CCC 1347, 1346). And the proof of what happened is kinetic: the same seven miles retraced that same hour, into the night, back toward the city they had given up on. Dead hope leaves Jerusalem; met hope returns that same hour.

Where the Skeptic Is Strongest (steelman)

Full strength, because this is the serious objection to Easter itself: “Bereaved people see their dead; grief hallucinations are common and well documented. Two heartbroken disciples on a lonely road are textbook candidates, and the resurrection appearances dissolve into grief psychology.” Grant the science: bereavement visions are real, common, and no embarrassment to anyone. Then test the fit honestly, feature by feature. Grief visions typically present the familiar face; here the process runs backwards: hours of non-recognition, then identification by a characteristic act. They are overwhelmingly private, individual experiences; the appearances are to pairs, to gatherings, to more than five hundred at once in a creed (1 Cor 15:6) dated by scholars across the spectrum to within a few years of the events. Nothing typical in the bereavement literature sustains a seven-mile expository conversation, shares a meal, or leaves behind a changed direction of travel; and above all such experiences tend to console rather than commission: hallucinations did not march these two back to Jerusalem at night, and they do not explain men going to their deaths for what they insisted they had seen. Be honest about the limit: no argument here compels; grief psychology explains some things, and the data of that first week resists being fully shelved under it. The question the road leaves open is the one this whole study keeps asking: who was He, actually?

Dig Deeper (optional)

The scene’s deepest echo is the Bible’s oldest: the sound of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8), a walking interrupted at the Fall, when the first question to hiding humanity was “Where are you?” And at Abraham’s tent, the LORD once came in the guise of traveling strangers and received the meal a host set before Him (Genesis 18); the Church has long heard in that scene an early echo of a divine guest at a human table. Emmaus is the walking resumed on the far side of the cross: God and man on the same road again, and the recognition, then as now, at a table. Some journeys in Scripture

are very long, and this one, Eden to Emmaus, ends seven miles outside Jerusalem, at dinner.

Send

3. "He appeared to be going further." If it is true that He will not cross a threshold uninvited, what does that change about how you read the silence you may have mistaken for absence?
4. Their eyes opened at a table, doing something ordinary. Where, honestly, are the tables in your life where something more than dinner might be going on?

Live It This Week

1. Walk with someone this week, literally: a walk where your only job is questions and listening, the stranger's method, start to finish.
2. Read Psalm 22 whole, once, alone, and then read Luke 23 beside it. Let the two texts introduce each other.
3. If your hope about something is in the past tense, say the two disciples' sentence once, out loud or in writing, exactly as they said it: stay with us. It is a complete prayer, and it has an excellent record.

Closing

Leader alone, briefly: "Lord, it is toward evening and the day is far spent. Stay with us. Amen."

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread." Luke 24:35

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Every Passage in This Session

Primary Text

- Luke 24:13-35, the road, the questions, the scriptures opened, the threshold, the breaking of the bread, the return

Live Discovery Text

- Psalm 22:1, 16-18, the crucifixion in Israel's hymnal, centuries early

Supporting Texts

- Genesis 3:8-9 and Genesis 18:1-8, the walking and the guest (Dig Deeper)
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-6, the early creed and the five hundred (steelman)

Catechism

- CCC 1347, 1346, 112

Memory Verse

- Luke 24:35