

SESSION 4

The Promise of Outpouring

Ezekiel 36 • Jeremiah 31 • Joel 2

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Participants discover that the prophets did not just describe the old pattern of the Spirit; they promised its end. Three prophecies stack up tonight: a new heart with God's Spirit put **WITHIN** you (Ezekiel), a covenant written on hearts instead of stone (Jeremiah), and the Spirit poured out on **ALL** flesh, sons and daughters, old and young, servants included (Joel). Moses' wish from Session 2 stops being a wish tonight and becomes a promissory note with God's signature on it.

Catholic Touchstone

The prophetic texts concerning the sending of the Holy Spirit announce a new covenant in which God will give His people a new heart and His own Spirit within them (CCC 715). The New Law of the Gospel is, first and foremost, not a text but the very grace of the Holy Spirit given to the faithful, the law written on hearts that Jeremiah promised (CCC 1965-1966). Confirmation stands inside that promise.

What You Need to Know

Track the prepositions. Sessions 1-3 gave the group the Spirit's task-gifts **UPON** the few, rushing and departing. Tonight the prophets change the prepositions, and, as a teaching frame for these particular texts, the prepositions are the theology. Ezekiel: "I will put my Spirit **WITHIN** you." Joel: "I will pour out my Spirit **ON ALL FLESH**." From upon to within; from the few to all. If the group leaves knowing only those two shifts, the session succeeded.

The setting is rock bottom. Jeremiah spoke on the edge of catastrophe and Ezekiel inside the exile itself; Joel's date is debated, but his book opens on a nation devastated by locusts. In each case the promise lands at a low point: God makes His biggest promises to His people in their ruins, not their strength. Say this plainly; there are households in your room at their own low points, and this is their session.

"All flesh" means what it says. Joel's list deliberately crosses every social boundary: sons **AND** daughters, old men **AND** young men, and even the male and female servants. Prophecy, the rare gift of Session 2, is promised across the whole people, down to the least credentialed. The idiom announces breadth, not a mechanical guarantee to every individual; let the group feel how radical the crossing is before anyone spiritualizes it.

Do not fire Thread B early. You know Peter quotes Joel at Pentecost. The group must not hear this from you tonight. If a participant already knows and says so, honor it briefly ("You've read ahead in the story, and you're right to smell it") and move on without opening Acts. The detonation belongs to Session 7.

For the parents in the room. Jeremiah's "law written on hearts" can sound to adults like religion without rules, and to teens like rules without escape. It is neither. The promise is not that God lowers the standard but that God moves the standard inside, supplying the desire and the power He commands. Augustine's line below is the tool for this. Parents who have spent years enforcing faith from the outside

should hear tonight that God's own plan was always an inside job, and that Confirmation is part of how He does it.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- Ezekiel 36:26-27 (a new heart, my Spirit within you) reaches back to the dry bones of Session 1 (Ezekiel 37 follows it immediately) and forward to the sacraments of the new covenant, where the Church hears this promise kept, above all in the washing and Spirit-gift of Christian initiation.
- Jeremiah 31:31-34 (the new covenant) is the only place the Old Testament uses the phrase "new covenant"; Jesus takes those exact words at the Last Supper. Do not develop this tonight beyond noticing it if the group does.
- Joel 2:28-29 (poured out on all flesh) powerfully develops Moses' wish in Numbers 11:29 and awaits its "this is that" moment in Session 7.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (*On the Spirit and the Letter*)

St. Augustine, in *On the Spirit and the Letter*, taught that the letter of the law, standing outside a person, commands what it cannot give, and kills; but the Spirit of the new covenant writes God's law inwardly and gives the love that fulfills it. His famous prayer from the Confessions distills it: give what You command, and command what You will.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae I-II, q. 106*)

St. Thomas asked what the New Law actually is (I-II, q. 106, a. 1), and answered: chiefly, it is the grace of the Holy Spirit, given inwardly to believers; the written teachings of the Gospel are its secondary, normative expression, guiding the life that grace gives. Jeremiah's promise of a law written on hearts is, for Thomas, a plain description of what the Holy Spirit does to a person.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Oration 41, On Pentecost*)

St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Oration 41, 11*) observed that God gives the Spirit by stages, accustoming us to His gifts by degrees: the Spirit worked in the prophets, was breathed on the apostles by the risen Christ, and was manifested with new fullness at Pentecost. The promises the group reads tonight are the middle of that staircase: the Spirit announcing, through the prophets, the fullness He intends to give.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 715.** The prophetic texts that directly concern the sending of the Holy Spirit announce a time when God will renew His people inwardly, writing His law on their hearts; Ezekiel 36 supplies tonight's "my Spirit within you" in Scripture's own words.

- **CCC 1965.** The New Law of the Gospel fulfills, refines, surpasses, and brings the Old Law to perfection; in it the promise of interiority that Jeremiah voiced comes to fulfillment.
- **CCC 1966.** The New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit given to the faithful through faith in Christ.

Thread Watch

Thread B: From the Few to the All. Develops decisively tonight. Moses' wish (memorized two weeks ago) meets Joel's promise in the group's own hands during live discovery. Your job is to make sure someone in the room says out loud that Joel sounds like Moses; if nobody does, ask innocently what tonight's discovery reminds them of. Resolution: Session 7.

Thread A: The Breath. Develops quietly: "within you" advances the arc from visiting to indwelling. Ezekiel 36 sits one page before the dry bones of Session 1; if a participant flips and notices, that is the thread working. Confirm nothing.

Session Goals

1. Participants can state the two prophetic shifts in their own words: from upon to within, and from the few to all.
2. Participants have found Joel 2:28-29 themselves and at least one participant has connected it to Numbers 11:29 aloud.
3. Participants can explain what is new about the new covenant of Jeremiah 31: not a lower standard, but an inside job.
4. The group has faced the "this is just about the return from exile" objection at full strength.
5. Each household leaves with the heart-of-stone evening practice.

Time Note

Full plan runs about 75 minutes. To land at 60, make these cuts and no others: drop Win question 1 (keep question 2), skip the Dig Deeper box on Isaiah 44, and present the steelman objection yourself in one minute rather than building it with the group. Never cut the live discovery of Joel or the prepositions teaching; those carry the session.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: *Come, Holy Spirit. You made promises through the prophets to a people at rock bottom: a new heart, Your own Spirit within, an outpouring on everyone. You have never once broken a promise, and You have not forgotten these. Read them with us tonight, and make us a people who dare to hold You to Your word. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Win: Opening Questions

Parent and candidate pairs. Two minutes each question, then a few pairs share with the table.

1. What is a promise someone made you that took a long time to keep? Was it worth the wait?
2. Parents especially: tell your partner about something you waited years for, and what the waiting did to you.

Build: Into the Text

Scene One: The Inside Job (Ezekiel 36:24-28)

Households read this twice at home and underlined the sentence that sounds least like the old pattern. Collect the underlinings first: go around and ask what people marked, before any questions.

Question 1. What exactly does God promise to do in verses 26-27? List every verb with God as the subject. Then answer: what is Israel's job in this promise?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God's verbs: I will give a new heart, I will put a new spirit within you, I will take out the heart of stone, I will give a heart of flesh, I will put MY Spirit within you, I will cause you to walk in my statutes. Israel's verbs: almost none; the people receive. This is a one-sided promise, all grace, made to a nation that had just proven it could not keep the two-sided kind. And catch the escalation the group may miss: verse 26 promises "a new spirit," often understood as a renewed human disposition; verse 27 goes unmistakably further: "my Spirit," God's own. God does not merely repair the engine; He moves in.

Question 2. Compare this with everything from Session 2. The Spirit "upon" Gideon, rushing and departing. Now: "within you." Why does the location matter so much?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

What is upon you can lift off; what is within you has become part of how you live. The old pattern empowered actions from outside; the promise transforms the actor from inside. A costume changes what you look like; a heart changes what you want. The prophets are promising the end of the visiting era. Whether and when God kept this promise is exactly the question the group should be leaving with tonight, unanswered.

Scene Two: Written on Hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Have someone read it aloud.

Question 3. God says the new covenant will NOT be like the covenant made at Sinai. What is the actual difference? Be precise: is God lowering the standard, changing the law, or doing something else?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Start with what Jeremiah says: not a lower standard but interiorization; the law once written on stone tablets outside the people, commanding what it could not supply, will be written on their hearts, so that knowing God and wanting what He wants comes from inside. And the New Testament adds what Jeremiah could not yet see: in Christ the New Law does not merely relocate the old but fulfills, refines, and perfects it, because the New Law is first of all the grace of the Holy Spirit Himself. St. Augustine prayed the difference in one line of the Confessions: give what You command, and command what You will. For a teenager, the difference between rules taped to the fridge and actually caring is the whole difference. God promises the caring.

Scene Three: Live Discovery

Do not announce the passage. Read the clue and let the tables hunt. Allow three or four minutes; if they stall, tell them it is one of the twelve short prophets near the end of the Old Testament, then that his book begins with an insect disaster.

DIG DEEPER

The clue. "A prophet has just watched locusts eat everything his nation had. And then God makes the biggest promise yet: afterward, I will pour something out. Not on prophets. Not on kings. On everyone: sons and daughters, the old and the young, even the servants. Find the pouring."

When found, have the discovering table read Joel 2:28-29 aloud, twice.

Question 4. Walk through Joel's list slowly. Sons and daughters. Old men and young men. Menservants and maidservants. In the world Joel lived in, who on that list would never, ever have been expected to receive the Spirit of prophecy?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Most of them, and be exact about it: Israel knew women prophets, Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, so the scandal is not that a daughter COULD prophesy, but that prophecy had been the exception, the rare and remarkable case. Joel promises the exception as the rule: sons and daughters, old and young, and even the servants, the least-credentialed of all. The list is engineered to cross every boundary his hearers assumed: sex, age, and status. The Spirit that once rested on seventy screened and summoned elders is promised across the whole people. If your room includes a fifteen-year-old who suspects Confirmation is for the holy kids, Joel disagrees, by name.

Question 5. Does this promise remind anyone of something we memorized two weeks ago? Say it from memory if you can.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!" (Numbers 11:29). Moses wished it; Joel promises it, developing the wish into an oracle: the Spirit poured out across every boundary of sex, age, and status, and prophecy no longer fenced to the few. A wish made in the wilderness has become, centuries later, a signed promise. Let the group sit in that for a moment. Then say only: a wish becoming a promise still leaves one question open, which is when the promise gets kept. Do not answer it. If someone answers it for you, smile and keep walking.

The Push-Back: A Promise Already Spent?

Build the objection at full strength before answering it. Ask the group to make it as strong as they can with you.

The objection. Read these prophecies in context and they are not about Christian sacraments at all. Ezekiel 36 is explicitly about God gathering Israel "from all the countries" back to their own land: the return from Babylonian exile, which happened in the 500s BC. Joel is consoling a nation after a locust plague. These promises had their fulfillment within Israel's own history, and reading Confirmation, or anything Christian, into them is anachronism: hijacking another nation's mail. The prophecies are spent.

Question 6. The context claim is accurate, so do not dodge it. Judah really did return from exile. Here is the test question: when the exiles came back, did they get what Ezekiel 36 and Joel 2 describe? How would you find out?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Concede the near horizon: these oracles really do address the exile and the return, and honest reading starts there. But run the test. The exiles returned, rebuilt the temple, and the last prophets of the Old Testament, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, describe the result: a people still half-hearted, priests offering polluted sacrifices, and no universal outpouring in sight. On the evidence of those books, the return did not exhaust the promise, and the strands of later Jewish hope that we can trace kept looking forward; the texts read as still open. The promises overshot their first horizon on purpose, the way a father promising a homesick child "we are going home, and home will be better than you remember" means more than the address. The honest remainder: nothing in the Old Testament by itself tells you when or how the promise lands. Someone with authority would have to stand up in public and say, of a specific event, "this is what was spoken by the prophet." Whether anyone ever did is a question for another night.

DIG DEEPER

Isaiah 44:3. If time allows, look it up: "I will pour water on the thirsty land... I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants." A third prophet, same verb, same direction: downward, abundant, and onto the next generation, which in your room means the candidates.

One Last Glimpse

Read John 7:37-39 aloud yourself, without introduction.

Jesus stands up at a festival and shouts that anyone who thirsts should come to him and drink, and rivers of living water will flow. Then the narrator leans in and explains: he said this about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. Say only this, and then stop: the tap has been promised, and the plumbing is in. Something still has to happen to Jesus first. Then the pouring starts.

Send: Closing Questions

1. Where in your life are you still running on rules taped to the fridge, doing the right thing without wanting it? What would it mean to ask God for the wanting?
2. God made His biggest promises to His people at rock bottom. If God made you one promise this year at your lowest point, what do you most need it to be?

Live It This Week

For every household, parent and candidate together. Each evening, each of you names one "stone moment" from the day, one moment your heart went hard: impatience, a grudge, a cold shoulder. No commentary and no fixing each other. Then pray one line together: "Take our hearts of stone, and give us hearts of flesh." Name it, pray it, done.

Closing Prayer

Leader: *Lord God, You promised a new heart and Your own Spirit within us. You promised an outpouring on sons and daughters, the old and the young, the overlooked and the unqualified. We are holding Your promises tonight with both hands. Keep them in us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Scripture Memory Verse

"A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 36:26)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 4, in order of use. RSV2CE.

- **Ezekiel 36:24-28** (Build, Scene One: new heart, my Spirit within you; read at home this week)
- **Jeremiah 31:31-34** (Build, Scene Two: the new covenant written on hearts)
- **Joel 2:28-29** (Build, Scene Three: live discovery, poured out on all flesh)
- **Numbers 11:29** (recalled from memory: Moses' wish)
- **Isaiah 44:3** (Dig Deeper: Spirit poured on your descendants)
- **John 7:37-39** (One Last Glimpse: rivers of living water, the Spirit not yet given)

Catechism: CCC 715, 1965, 1966.

Voices: St. Augustine of Hippo (On the Spirit and the Letter); St. Thomas Aquinas (Summa Theologiae I-II, q. 106); St. Gregory Nazianzen (Oration 41, On Pentecost).

Distribute at the door: Take-Home 4, one per household.