

Take-Home: Session 1, The Hiding God

WHAT WE FOUND

The hiddenness of God is not a modern discovery made against the Bible. It is a confession the Bible made first. Isaiah calls the God of Israel a God who hides himself, and in the same breath calls him Savior. The psalms pray the complaint; Job speaks it; and when Moses asks for the direct sight of God's face, God refuses him, for his protection, not out of coldness. And through all of it runs a covenant promise: not spectacle, not proof, but the whole heart, a seeking that God's own grace makes possible. God, on Scripture's account, is hidden from spectators and found by seekers.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

In his *Confessions* (X.27), St. Augustine confesses that he had searched for God everywhere except the one place God was waiting: within him. God was with him; it was Augustine who was not with God.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

St. Thomas teaches (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 1) that God's existence is self-evident in itself but not to us, because we do not see God's essence. Our minds travel to God from his effects: we might say, as from a work of art back to the artist.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

The *Spiritual Canticle* opens with the soul's cry: where have you hidden, Beloved? Even the greatest mystics began in hiddenness. St. John teaches, in substance, that the Beloved is not absent but hidden within the soul itself, and that his hiddenness sets the soul searching.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Each day this week, say one honest sentence to God, out loud or written. If you are unsure he is there, honesty still counts: even, if you are there, I want to know, is a prayer this week's texts would recognize.
- Once this week, reread Psalm 13 slowly and notice where it ends compared to where it begins.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you." Jeremiah 29:13-14 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read Psalm 27, slowly, once. Notice what the psalmist says his heart is doing.

CATECHISM REFERENCES

CCC 30; 35 to 37; 2566 to 2567.

MY GUESS: SEAL IT TONIGHT

In one honest sentence: what would it take for you to believe? (If you already believe: what did it actually take?)

*Fold this sheet along the box, seal it, write your name on the outside, and bring it back every week.
You will be told when it opens.*

Take-Home: Session 2, What Faith Is (and Isn't)

WHAT WE FOUND

We put a definition on trial: faith is belief without evidence. The New Testament refused it on its own pages. Luke opens his Gospel describing eyewitness sources and careful investigation, written so that we may know the truth. John says the signs were written down as grounds for belief. The Bereans checked the Scriptures daily and were called noble for it. And Abraham, the Bible's model of faith, reasoned from what he knew of God's character. Biblical faith is trust in a credible witness: trust of the same shape as the reasoned trust that carries a human life, elevated by grace and directed to God who reveals, grounded and free.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

St. John Henry Newman teaches, in substance, in his *Grammar of Assent* that we rightly reach certitude by the convergence of many probabilities, the way a judge weighs evidence. Faith, we might say with Newman, is not an exception to how we know; it is reasoned trust at full depth.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

St. Thomas teaches, in substance (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 2), that to believe is the intellect assenting to divine truth at the command of a will moved by grace: neither a feeling nor a leap in the dark.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. ANSELM OF CANTERBURY

St. Anselm's program in the *Proslogion*: I believe in order to understand (*credo ut intelligam*). In our own application of his program: trust opens a kind of understanding that suspicion never reaches, the way trusting a person is the only way to know them.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pick one Gospel passage and read it the way Luke wrote: asking, who saw this, and who is staking their name on it?
- Continue the daily honest sentence to God from last week. If you skipped days, no scorekeeping; start again.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Hebrews 11:1
(RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read Psalm 19, slowly, once. Notice how many different ways it says that something is speaking.

CATECHISM REFERENCES

CCC 150; 154 to 156; 158 to 159.

Take-Home: Session 3, Show Us the Father

WHAT WE FOUND

Tonight the sealed envelopes opened, and we discovered that our question had already been asked, twice. At Sinai (Exodus 20:18-19), when God spoke as directly as a crowd could bear, the people begged for a mediator: let not God speak to us, lest we die. And at the Last Supper an apostle asked a question strikingly close to our sealed sentences: Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied. The answer he received is the Christian claim entire: he who has seen me has seen the Father. 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). One question stays open on purpose: how a Word spoken then reaches each of us now. The study is headed exactly there.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

Writing on the road to martyrdom, St. Ignatius teaches in his *Letter to the Magnesians* that the one God manifested himself through Jesus Christ his Son. The claim is the session in one line: whatever silence the seeker knows, a Word has come out of it, in the flesh.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS

St. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* IV.20.7): the glory of God is the living human being, and the life of the human being is the vision of God. The Son is how the invisible Father becomes seeable without destroying the seer.

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. Not God shouting louder: God translating himself.

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 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read Psalm 139, slowly, once. Notice who is doing the searching in it, and who is being searched.

CATECHISM REFERENCES

CCC 65; 73; 516.

Take-Home: Session 4, Are the Stakes Fair?

WHAT WE FOUND

We tested the assumption this study began with: that heaven and hell are decided by a belief quiz. Scripture and the Church describe something richer, in which faith is a life rather than a quiz answer: faith in Christ, received in grace and working through love, remains necessary where the Gospel is known, and judgment according to works manifests the reality of that response. God renders to every one according to works; those who never received the law are judged by the law written on their hearts, conscience bearing witness. Jesus' most extended depiction of the last judgment grades on concrete love, and surprises everyone in it. Accountability scales to knowledge: much given, much required. Hell, in the Catechism's own word, is self-exclusion: God predestines no one to it, and losing him requires grave matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent, persisted in without repentance to the end (CCC 1857-1861, 1037), not honest mistake. The stakes are real, and the Judge is the one who was sent not to condemn the world but to save it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

From St. Augustine's *Sermons* (Sermon 169): God, who created you without you, will not justify you without you. Salvation is never imposed; damnation is never arbitrary. The stakes are real because the freedom is real.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

In his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, St. John Henry Newman calls conscience the aboriginal Vicar of Christ: a witness to God's law already in every heart, before any missionary arrives, a conscience that must be followed and formed. No one faces the Judge as a stranger.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

A saying from his *Sayings of Light and Love*, quoted by the Catechism at CCC 1022: at the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love. The examination at the end is not a theology exam. It is an examination in love.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Do one deliberate, inconvenient act of Matthew 25 love this week: feed, visit, welcome, clothe, or show up. Do not announce it.
- Continue the daily honest sentence to God. If tonight raised a fear or a grief, that is this week's sentence.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:17 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read Psalm 77, slowly, once. Notice where the psalm turns, and what the psalmist starts doing at the turn.

CATECHISM REFERENCES

CCC 1021 to 1022; 1033; 1036 to 1037; 1861; 847.

Take-Home: Session 5, Honest Doubt

WHAT WE FOUND

We watched Jesus handle doubters, four times, on the record. A father confessed belief and unbelief in one breath, and his son was healed. John the Baptist's searching question came from prison, his own doubt or his disciples', and was answered with evidence, then he was praised as the greatest born of women. Thomas set conditions, and the risen Christ arrived and met them, wounds first, before pointing beyond them. And at the Great Commission itself, some doubted, and he commissioned that exact group. Scripture even makes engaging doubters a command: convince some, who doubt. The Church's precision helps: the honest hesitation a person cannot switch off is not the same as refusal, and a difficulty is not yet a doubt. Doubt is met, not celebrated; honest, involuntary doubt places no one beyond Christ's mercy. Bring it to him rather than cultivating refusal.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

From his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*: ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt (as he understood the subject). In this study's gloss: a difficulty is a question not yet resolved; a doubt is a verdict. An honest mind can carry unresolved difficulties inside a settled trust.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. GREGORY THE GREAT

From his *Homilies on the Gospels* (Homily 26): the disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the belief of the other disciples. Because Thomas touched and was convinced, every later generation's doubt finds its answer in his.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA

Her letters, published in *Come Be My Light*, reveal decades of felt darkness through which she continued to pray, serve, and believe, and the Church canonized her. Felt certainty is not the measure of faith; fidelity in the dark is.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray Mark 9:24 once a day, in those words, whatever your ratio of belief to unbelief currently is.
- When doubt surfaces, try Psalm 77's move once: deliberately list three things, evidence, experiences, people, that originally made God seem possible or real to you, and look at the list before you rule.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"I believe; help my unbelief!" Mark 9:24 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read Psalm 34, slowly, once. Notice what verse 8 invites you to do, and what kind of knowing it assumes.

CATECHISM REFERENCES

CCC 157; 164; 2088.

Take-Home: Session 6, To Whom Shall We Go?

WHAT WE FOUND

The question we left open in Session 3, how does a Word spoken then reach me now, found its answer in a pattern. On the Emmaus road the risen Christ opened the Scriptures and hearts burned; he broke the bread and eyes were opened; and at the moment of recognition he vanished, and the Church has long seen in that moment her own Eucharist: a hiddenness his friends could return to. Days after Pentecost the first community was already devoted to the teaching and the breaking of the bread; a century later St. Justin described the same shape to a pagan emperor; and it is what happens at every Mass. God speaks through creation and conscience, through prophets and witnesses, definitively in his Son, and the speaking never stopped: he speaks when the Scriptures are read, and he is present, hidden and real, in the Eucharist. The God who hides himself hides the way a presence hides: close enough to approach. And the offer stays in the present tense: behold, I stand at the door and knock.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

The Eucharistic hymn *Adoro Te Devote*, attributed to St. Thomas, adores the Godhead truly hidden beneath the appearances of bread and wine: sight, touch, and taste are deceived here, and hearing, faith in what the Son has said, is the ground of trust. And the hymn's last stanza begs for the unveiled face: the veil is real, and it is promised to lift.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. JUSTIN MARTYR

Around the year 155, in his *First Apology*, St. Justin described Sunday worship: the memoirs of the apostles and the prophets read, prayers offered, and bread and wine received not as common food but as the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus. The Emmaus shape, a century on, already ordinary.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

From the opening of his *Confessions* (I.1): God has made us for himself, and our heart is restless until it rests in him. The seeking this study honored in its first session was never evidence of God's absence. It was evidence of the destination.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Accept the invitation, or make it: one Mass, together, watching for the Emmaus shape: Scriptures opened, bread broken.
- Keep the daily honest sentence going beyond the study. It was never an exercise; it was the door handle.
- Reread the sentence you sealed in Session 1, one last time, and ask it back: what would it take, and what, in six weeks, has it already taken?

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life;” John 6:68 (RSV2CE)

CONTINUING ON

The core study ends here, but its open questions each have a stand-alone deep-dive evening; ask your host what your group is doing next. And wherever you go from here: he stands at the door and knocks.

CATECHISM REFERENCES

CCC 1088; 1373 to 1374; 104; 2567.