



# Seven Signs

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A LENTEN BIBLE STUDY

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*A Journey to Easter*

*Leader's Guide*

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### **About the Author**

*Pastor Burt is a Master of Divinity graduate from Bangor Theological Seminary and ordained in the United Church of Christ. Beginning as a youth minister and later serving as a licensed pastor in Maine, he brings over 30 years of ministry experience. He blends thoughtful leadership with a personable approach, focusing on hope, healing, and community. As a husband and father of four, he nurtures his congregations like family—creating spaces where all are embraced, grow together, and encounter God. He hopes to leave a legacy of fostering welcoming places where people walk in faith together.*

**Leader's Guide**  
**Seven Signs: A Lenten Bible Study**  
*A Journey to Easter Through the Gospel of John*

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## Leader Introduction

### **A Pastoral Word to Those Who Will Guide This Journey**

Dear Friend in Christ,

Thank you for saying yes.

Before you are a facilitator, you are a fellow traveler. Before you lead discussion, you are someone being formed by the same Scriptures you will help others explore. This guide is not a script to master or a manual to perform perfectly. It is simply support as you create space for God to meet people in the living Word.

This study was written as an invitation, not an assignment. The Gospel of John calls these moments “signs” because they point beyond themselves. They reveal who Jesus is and how God’s life is unfolding among us. Your role is not to explain every detail of these signs. Your role is to help others notice where those signs are already appearing in their own lives.

You are not responsible for outcomes.

You are responsible for presence.

You are not called to have all the answers.

You are called to listen deeply.

You are not expected to control the room.

You are invited to cultivate a space where trust can grow.

Spiritual formation rarely happens in dramatic moments. More often, it unfolds quietly—through honest conversation, attentive silence, and shared reflection. Sometimes the most meaningful movement in a group happens in the pauses. Do not rush them. Trust them.

As you prepare each week, begin not with your notes but with prayer. Ask:

- What is this sign revealing in me?
- Where is this Scripture inviting me to trust more deeply?
- What part of this story feels tender or unfinished in my own life?

Allow the text to work on you before you guide others through it.

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Remember that each person who walks into your group carries a story. Some come with steady faith. Others arrive carrying doubt, grief, or exhaustion. Some will speak easily. Others will need time before words come. Make room for all of it. Lent is not a season for performance; it is a season for honest transformation.

If conversation feels slow, that is not failure.

If questions arise without resolution, that is not weakness.

If emotion surfaces, that is not disruption.

Often, those are signs that something real is happening.

Your task is simple and sacred:

- Read the Scripture slowly.
- Ask the questions gently.
- Guard the space graciously.
- Close in prayer faithfully.

Trust the Holy Spirit to do what only the Spirit can do.

This study aligns with our worship life during Lent. The same signs you will explore in conversation will echo in Sunday's preaching and prayer. You are helping weave a shared spiritual journey across our congregation. What happens in your living room or fellowship space matters deeply.

Thank you for your willingness to serve in this way. Thank you for offering your calm presence, your listening heart, and your steady faith.

May you discover that as you lead others through these signs, Christ is also revealing Himself anew to you.

Grace and peace,  
Pastor Burt

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## **Leading with Confidence and Humility**

There is a quiet balance in spiritual leadership: confidence rooted in calling, and humility rooted in grace.

Confidence does not mean certainty. It means trust. You were invited to lead because someone sees in you steadiness, faithfulness, and the capacity to hold space for others. Trust that affirmation. Prepare thoughtfully. Pray intentionally. Show up ready. That is confidence.

Humility reminds us that God is already at work long before we arrive and will continue long after we leave. The Spirit does not depend on perfect phrasing or seamless transitions. Sometimes a hesitant question opens more doors than a polished explanation. Sometimes “I’m not sure—what do you think?” is the most faithful response you can offer.

Leading with confidence and humility means:

- Speaking when guidance is needed.
- Stepping back when conversation is unfolding well.
- Admitting when you do not know.
- Holding your convictions gently.
- Trusting Scripture more than your own commentary.

If someone raises a difficult theological question, you do not need to resolve it fully. You can say, “That’s a thoughtful question. Let’s sit with that together.” If silence stretches longer than feels comfortable, allow it to breathe. Silence is often where reflection deepens.

Confidence anchors the group.

Humility opens the group.

In the Gospel of John, the signs do not force belief; they invite response. In the same way, you are not leading people toward conclusions you must secure. You are helping create a setting where encounter becomes possible.

You are not performing leadership.

You are practicing faith alongside others.

And that is enough.

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## **A Prayer for Leaders Before Week One**

Gracious and faithful God,

You are the One who calls, gathers, and forms Your people.  
Before we lead anyone else, we place ourselves before You.

Thank You for the gift of Your Word that still speaks, still invites, still transforms. As we begin this journey through the signs in John's Gospel, quiet our need to perform and deepen our trust in Your Spirit.

Give us confidence rooted not in our own understanding, but in Your steady presence. Where we feel unsure, steady us. Where we feel inadequate, remind us that You are the One at work.

Make us attentive listeners.

Make us gentle guides.

Make us patient with silence and gracious in conversation.

Guard the spaces where we will gather. Prepare the hearts of those who will come. Let honesty be welcomed, questions be honored, and grace be felt.

As You revealed Your glory in ordinary moments, reveal Yourself among us—in living rooms, fellowship halls, and quiet circles of conversation. Form us as we help form others. Shape our hearts even as we open Scripture together.

We entrust this season to You.

Lead us as we lead.

Speak as we listen.

Transform us all through Your living Word.

In Christ's name we pray,

Amen.

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## Week 1 – Leader Preparation

### **The Wedding at Cana**

**Theme: Transformation and New Beginnings**

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### **Big Idea**

Jesus' first sign does not take place in a synagogue or at the temple, but at a wedding feast. In the midst of joy and ordinary human celebration, a quiet lack emerges—the wine runs out. Rather than drawing attention to Himself, Jesus transforms what is common into something abundant. This sign reveals that God's glory often appears not in spectacle, but in everyday moments of trust and obedience. The invitation for this week is simple yet profound: Where might Christ already be transforming what feels ordinary or unfinished in our lives?

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### **The Movement of the Text**

- Celebration and community gathering
- A quiet crisis: the wine runs out
- Mary's trust: "Do whatever he tells you."
- Obedient action: the jars are filled
- Transformation: water becomes wine
- Revelation: glory revealed, disciples believe

Encourage leaders to hold this narrative arc gently in mind. The movement from lack to abundance is central to the conversation.

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## Emotional Landscape

Participants may resonate with:

- The feeling of “running out” (energy, patience, hope, joy)
- Embarrassment or quiet inadequacy
- Trusting without full understanding
- Longing for something new to begin

Be attentive to:

- Conversations about scarcity (emotional, financial, spiritual)
- Participants who may feel stuck or spiritually dry
- Over-spiritualizing the story instead of noticing its human texture

This is a gentle entry into Lent. Allow the tone to remain hopeful without forcing conclusions.

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## Theological Anchors

- In John’s Gospel, “signs” reveal identity, not just power
- This is the first public revealing of Jesus’ glory.
- The abundance (approximately 120–180 gallons) is extravagant, not minimal.
- The transformation happens through participation (servants filling jars).
- God’s work often begins within ordinary life, not outside it.

Keep this section as quiet grounding. It is scaffolding for the leader, not material to lecture.

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## **Suggested Flow of the Gathering**

### **75-Minute Model**

Welcome and Opening Prayer – 5 minutes

Read John 2:1–11 Slowly – 5 minutes

Two Minutes of Silence – 2 minutes

Initial Discussion Questions – 30–35 minutes

Going Deeper Section – 15 minutes

Personal Reflection – 8–10 minutes

Closing Prayer – 5 minutes

Encourage participants to hear the Scripture before analyzing it. Do not rush the silence.

### **60-Minute Model (If Needed)**

Welcome and Prayer – 5 minutes

Scripture Reading – 5 minutes

Discussion – 35 minutes

Reflection and Prayer – 15 minutes

Flexibility is faithful. Do not sacrifice meaningful conversation for completion.

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## **Gentle Prompts if Conversation Slows**

- “What detail stands out to you most?”
- “Why do you think Jesus chose a wedding for His first sign?”
- “Where in your life does something feel like it has ‘run out’?”
- “What does Mary’s trust teach us?”

If discussion becomes analytical, gently return to personal reflection:

“What does this story stir in you?”

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## Watch For

- Turning the conversation into a debate about alcohol.
- Over-symbolizing every detail of the jars.
- Rushing too quickly to metaphor without honoring the human setting.
- Minimizing the emotional weight of running out.

Stay grounded in relational tone.

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## Pastoral Awareness

For some participants, “running out” may touch deeper realities—burnout, grief, relational strain, or spiritual dryness.

If someone shares something personal:

- Thank them sincerely.
- Let the group sit with it briefly.
- Ask, “Would you like us to pray for you?”
- Follow up privately if appropriate.

You are offering presence, not solutions.

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## Leader Reflection Before Closing

After the gathering, reflect briefly:

- Where did I sense genuine openness tonight?
- Did someone share something that needs quiet follow-up?
- How did this Scripture speak to me personally?

Remember: growth often unfolds slowly. Trust what you cannot immediately see.

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## Week 2 – Leader Preparation

### Healing the Royal Official's Son

**Theme: Faith Across Distance**

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#### Big Idea

This sign unfolds almost entirely in the space between promise and fulfillment. A desperate father comes to Jesus seeking healing for his son. Instead of traveling with him, Jesus offers a word: “Go; your son will live.” The official must decide whether that word is enough. This story invites the group into reflection on what it means to trust Christ when the outcome is not yet visible. Faith here is not certainty — it is movement. It is walking home before proof appears

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#### The Movement of the Text

- A crisis: a child near death
- A plea for intervention
- Jesus' challenging statement about signs and belief
- A spoken promise
- The father's decision to trust
- Confirmation on the journey home
- Household belief

Hold the arc: **desperation → word → movement → confirmation → deeper belief.**

The turning point is not the healing itself, but the father choosing to walk away trusting what Jesus has spoken.

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## Emotional Landscape

Participants may resonate with:

- Anxiety for someone they love
- Prayers that feel delayed
- The tension between desperation and trust
- The fear of hoping too much

Be attentive to:

- Parents or grandparents carrying worry
- Those navigating medical uncertainty
- Those praying for estranged relationships
- Participants who have experienced unanswered prayer

This week may move into tender spaces. Allow honesty without rushing reassurance.

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## Theological Anchors

- In John's Gospel, belief often deepens over time
- Jesus heals across distance — presence is not limited by proximity.
- Faith is portrayed as trust in Jesus' word before visible evidence.
- The household's belief suggests faith can ripple outward.

Keep these as grounding principles, not lecture content.

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## **Suggested Flow of the Gathering**

### **75-Minute Model**

Welcome and Opening Prayer – 5 minutes

Read John 4:46–54 Slowly – 5 minutes

Silence – 2 minutes

Initial Discussion Questions – 30–35 minutes

Going Deeper – 15 minutes

Personal Reflection – 8–10 minutes

Closing Prayer – 5 minutes

Encourage participants to notice emotional movement in the story, not just the miracle itself.

### **60-Minute Model (If Needed)**

Welcome and Prayer – 5 minutes

Scripture Reading – 5 minutes

Core Discussion – 35 minutes

Reflection and Prayer – 15 minutes

Do not rush the tension of waiting.

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## **Gentle Prompts if Conversation Slows**

- “Why do you think Jesus did not go with the official?”
- “What do you notice about the father’s response?”
- “What does walking home represent in this story?”
- “Where are you being asked to trust at a distance?”

If theological debate arises around miracles, gently redirect:

“What does this story reveal about trust?”

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## Watch For

- Turning the story into a debate about whether miracles still happen.
- Offering simplistic explanations for suffering.
- Minimizing the emotional weight of parental fear.
- Rushing too quickly to resolution.

Allow the waiting to remain present in the room.

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## Pastoral Awareness

This passage may stir deep anxiety, especially for those who have:

- Lost a child
- Walked through medical crises
- Experienced unanswered prayer

If someone shares something vulnerable:

- Thank them sincerely.
- Sit quietly for a moment.
- Ask if they would like prayer.
- Follow up privately if needed.

Resist the urge to explain suffering. Presence is faithful.

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## Leader Reflection Before Closing

After the gathering, reflect:

- Where did I sense longing in the group?
- Did someone share something that needs gentle follow-up?
- How am I personally being invited to trust more deeply?

Faith across distance is rarely dramatic. It is steady, often quiet. Trust that what is forming may not yet be visible.

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## Week 3 – Leader Preparation

### **Healing at the Pool of Bethesda**

**Theme: Restoration and Hope**

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### **Big Idea**

This sign introduces us to a man whose life has been shaped by waiting — thirty-eight years of limitation, disappointment, and survival. When Jesus asks, “Do you want to be made well?” the question is not cruel; it is revealing. Long seasons of waiting can reshape identity. Healing would mean change, and change is not always simple. This week invites honest reflection on what it means to desire restoration — and what it might cost to rise when Christ calls

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### **The Movement of the Text**

- A crowded place of suffering
- A man waiting for decades
- Jesus’ unexpected question
- The man’s explanation of helplessness
- A direct command: “Stand up.”
- Immediate healing
- Controversy over Sabbath law
- Jesus’ later encounter in the temple

Hold the arc: **long waiting → invitation → command → restoration → complication.**

Notice that healing does not end tension; it creates new challenges.

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## Emotional Landscape

Participants may resonate with:

- Feeling stuck in long-standing patterns
- Chronic illness or limitation
- Disappointment after repeated setbacks
- Fear of change, even when change is good

Be attentive to:

- Those living with chronic health conditions
- Those who feel overlooked or forgotten
- Those who have adapted to difficult circumstances
- Conversations around blame or personal responsibility

This week can surface both longing and defensiveness. Move gently.

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## Theological Anchors

- Jesus begins with a question, not an explanation
- Healing here is both physical and relational.
- The Sabbath controversy reveals differing views of restoration.
- Jesus' final words suggest wholeness involves more than physical change.

Keep this section grounded and brief.

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## Suggested Flow of the Gathering

### 75-Minute Model

Welcome and Opening Prayer – 5 minutes

Read John 5:1–15 Slowly – 5 minutes

Silence – 2 minutes

Discussion Questions – 30–35 minutes

Going Deeper – 15 minutes

Personal Reflection – 8–10 minutes

Closing Prayer – 5 minutes

Allow the weight of thirty-eight years to settle before rushing into application.

### 60-Minute Model (If Needed)

Welcome and Prayer – 5 minutes

Scripture Reading – 5 minutes

Core Discussion – 35 minutes

Reflection and Prayer – 15 minutes

Be patient with slower responses this week.

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## Gentle Prompts if Conversation Slows

- “Why do you think Jesus begins with a question?”
- “What might have made change difficult after so many years?”
- “What does ‘taking up your mat’ symbolize?”
- “Where in your life do you long to rise?”

If discussion moves toward blame, gently redirect:

“What does this story show us about compassion?”

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## Watch For

- Oversimplifying chronic illness.
- Suggesting lack of faith causes suffering.
- Turning the conversation into a legal debate about Sabbath law.
- Forcing personal disclosure too quickly.

Allow people to share at their own pace.

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## Pastoral Awareness

This passage may touch:

- Chronic health struggles
- Long-term grief
- Addiction recovery
- Patterns people feel ashamed of

If vulnerability emerges:

- Thank them.
- Do not analyze their story.
- Offer prayer gently.
- Follow up privately if needed.

Healing is complex. Avoid neat conclusions.

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## Leader Reflection Before Closing

After the gathering, reflect:

- Where did I sense both longing and hesitation?
- Did someone share something that requires follow-up?
- What “mat” might I personally be carrying?

Restoration rarely happens all at once. Trust that even honest conversation is movement.

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## Week 4 – Leader Preparation

### Feeding the Five Thousand

**Theme: God's Abundance**

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### Big Idea

A large crowd gathers with hunger — both physical and spiritual. The disciples immediately see scarcity: not enough bread, not enough money, not enough resources. Jesus begins somewhere else. He starts with what is offered, gives thanks, and places it in God's hands. This sign reveals that abundance does not begin with surplus; it begins with trust. This week invites participants to examine where fear of “not enough” shapes their thinking — and how Christ invites them into a deeper confidence in God's provision

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### The Movement of the Text

- A growing crowd
- A question that tests the disciples
- Scarcity calculations
- A small offering
- Thanksgiving before multiplication
- Everyone fed
- Nothing wasted
- Recognition of Jesus' identity

Hold the arc: **perceived lack** → **offered smallness** → **gratitude** → **abundance** → **recognition**.

Notice that gratitude precedes the miracle.

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## Emotional Landscape

Participants may resonate with:

- Anxiety about not having enough
- Financial strain or insecurity
- Feeling their contribution is too small to matter
- Burnout from giving too much

Be attentive to:

- Conversations about money or church resources
- Shame around perceived inadequacy
- Participants who feel invisible or undervalued
- Scarcity language (“There’s never enough...”)

This week can expose subtle fear beneath daily life.

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## Theological Anchors

- Jesus begins with gratitude before provision
- Abundance is communal — everyone is fed.
- Participation matters; the small offering is not dismissed.
- “Nothing may be lost” reveals God’s attentive care.

Keep this as steady internal grounding.

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## **Suggested Flow of the Gathering**

### **75-Minute Model**

Welcome and Opening Prayer – 5 minutes

Read John 6:1–14 Slowly – 5 minutes

Silence – 2 minutes

Discussion Questions – 30–35 minutes

Going Deeper – 15 minutes

Personal Reflection – 8–10 minutes

Closing Prayer – 5 minutes

Encourage participants to notice both the disciples' calculations and Jesus' posture.

### **60-Minute Model (If Needed)**

Welcome and Prayer – 5 minutes

Scripture Reading – 5 minutes

Core Discussion – 35 minutes

Reflection and Prayer – 15 minutes

Allow gratitude to frame the closing.

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## **Gentle Prompts if Conversation Slows**

- “Why do you think Jesus asks Philip the question?”
- “What feels too small in your own life right now?”
- “What does giving thanks before seeing the outcome require?”
- “How does this story challenge scarcity thinking?”

If conversation becomes abstract, return to lived experience:

“Where do you personally struggle with ‘not enough’?”

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## Watch For

- Turning the story into a debate about literal vs. symbolic multiplication.
- Shaming participants about generosity.
- Over-connecting the story directly to church giving.
- Minimizing real financial stress people carry.

Let the tone remain invitational, not corrective.

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## Pastoral Awareness

This passage may touch:

- Financial anxiety
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Burnout in caregiving or service
- Hidden resentment from over-giving

If vulnerability surfaces:

- Thank the person.
- Affirm their honesty.
- Avoid quick spiritual fixes.
- Offer prayer grounded in trust and gratitude.

Abundance is not denial of hardship; it is trust within it.

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## Leader Reflection Before Closing

After the gathering, reflect:

- Where did I hear scarcity language?
- Where did gratitude begin to shift tone?
- What small offering am I personally hesitant to place in God's hands?

Abundance rarely begins with comfort. It begins with surrender.

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## Week 5 – Leader Preparation

### Walking on the Water

**Theme: Courage in the Storm**

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### Big Idea

The disciples are doing exactly what they were told to do — and still find themselves in darkness, wind, and fear. The storm does not indicate failure. It is in the midst of that fear that Jesus comes toward them. Before the waters calm, before the boat reaches shore, He speaks: “It is I; do not be afraid.” This sign reveals that courage does not come from control over circumstances but from recognizing who is present in them. This week invites reflection on how Christ meets us in the storm rather than removing it

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### The Movement of the Text

- Evening and darkness
- Rough waters and strong wind
- The disciples straining at the oars
- Jesus approaching in an unexpected way
- Fear and misrecognition
- The words: “It is I.”
- Immediate arrival at shore

Hold the arc: **obedience → storm → fear → recognition → arrival.**

Notice that peace begins with presence, not calm conditions.

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## Emotional Landscape

Participants may resonate with:

- Feeling overwhelmed despite doing the “right” things
- Anxiety that distorts perception
- Spiritual disorientation
- Long seasons of uncertainty

Be attentive to:

- Those navigating illness, job insecurity, or relational strain
- Participants who feel spiritually distant
- Conversations about fear and control
- Subtle shame around struggling faith

This week may surface raw honesty about fear.

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## Theological Anchors

- The storm is not punishment; the disciples are obedient
- “It is I” echoes divine self-revelation.
- Recognition precedes rescue.
- The story emphasizes presence more than spectacle.

Keep this steady and uncluttered.

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## Suggested Flow of the Gathering

### 75-Minute Model

Welcome and Opening Prayer – 5 minutes

Read John 6:16–21 Slowly – 5 minutes

Silence – 2 minutes

Discussion Questions – 30–35 minutes

Going Deeper – 15 minutes

Personal Reflection – 8–10 minutes

Closing Prayer – 5 minutes

Allow space for participants to name fear without rushing reassurance.

### 60-Minute Model (If Needed)

Welcome and Prayer – 5 minutes

Scripture Reading – 5 minutes

Core Discussion – 35 minutes

Reflection and Prayer – 15 minutes

Keep the tone steady and grounded.

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## Gentle Prompts if Conversation Slows

- “Why do you think the disciples were terrified?”
- “What makes it hard to recognize Jesus in difficult moments?”
- “What does welcoming Jesus into the boat look like today?”
- “How does courage differ from control?”

If conversation drifts into abstract theology, gently return:

“Where do you personally feel tossed about right now?”

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## Watch For

- Suggesting storms are sent by God to teach lessons.
- Minimizing fear with quick reassurance.
- Over-spiritualizing hardship.
- Forcing participants to share more than they wish.

Let fear be named honestly.

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## Pastoral Awareness

This passage may touch:

- Anxiety disorders
- Grief or recent loss
- Financial or relational instability
- Spiritual dryness

If someone becomes emotional:

- Pause the room gently.
- Offer steady presence.
- Invite prayer if appropriate.
- Follow up privately if needed.

Courage grows in safety, not pressure.

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## Leader Reflection Before Closing

After the gathering, reflect:

- Where did fear surface honestly?
- Did someone share something that needs follow-up?
- Where am I personally struggling to recognize Christ's presence?

Courage is rarely loud. It is often quiet trust in the dark.

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## Week 6 – Leader Preparation

### Healing the Man Born Blind

**Theme:** Seeing with New Eyes

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### Big Idea

The disciples begin with a question about blame: “Who sinned?” Jesus reframes the conversation entirely. Instead of explaining suffering, He reveals purpose and presence. Sight is restored quickly, but understanding unfolds gradually — for the man, for the religious leaders, and even for the disciples. This sign invites reflection on how we see — ourselves, others, suffering, and Christ. Spiritual sight is not instant clarity; it is growing recognition

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### The Movement of the Text

- A question rooted in blame
- Jesus’ reframing of suffering
- Physical healing through unexpected means
- Community confusion and interrogation
- The man’s growing testimony
- Religious resistance
- Personal encounter with Jesus
- Confession and worship

Hold the arc: **misunderstanding → healing → testimony → resistance → deeper revelation.**

Notice that the man’s clarity increases as opposition intensifies.

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## Emotional Landscape

Participants may resonate with:

- Being misunderstood
- Having their story questioned
- Gradual growth in faith
- Wrestling with doubt

Be attentive to:

- Conversations about suffering and fault
- Participants who have felt judged
- Those navigating spiritual growth or deconstruction
- Defensive reactions to religious authority

This week can stir both gratitude and discomfort.

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## Theological Anchors

- Jesus rejects a simplistic cause-and-effect view of suffering

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- “I am the light of the world” frames the sign.
- Healing precedes full understanding.
- The man’s testimony is honest and evolving.

Keep this steady and accessible.

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## **Suggested Flow of the Gathering**

### **75-Minute Model**

Welcome and Opening Prayer – 5 minutes  
Read John 9:1–12 (and 35–38) Slowly – 5 minutes  
Silence – 2 minutes  
Discussion Questions – 30–35 minutes  
Going Deeper – 15 minutes  
Personal Reflection – 8–10 minutes  
Closing Prayer – 5 minutes

Encourage the group to notice how the man's testimony evolves.

### **60-Minute Model (If Needed)**

Welcome and Prayer – 5 minutes  
Scripture Reading – 5 minutes  
Core Discussion – 35 minutes  
Reflection and Prayer – 15 minutes

Allow room for reflection rather than debate.

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## **Gentle Prompts if Conversation Slows**

- “Why do you think the disciples start with blame?”
- “What does Jesus’ response reveal about God?”
- “How does the man’s understanding grow?”
- “Where might God be inviting you to see differently?”

If conversation becomes argumentative about theology of suffering, gently redirect:  
“What does this story show us about compassion?”

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## Watch For

- Offering neat explanations for suffering.
- Turning the conversation into a doctrinal debate.
- Minimizing real experiences of injustice.
- Shaming doubt or evolving faith.

Keep the focus on revelation and growth.

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## Pastoral Awareness

This passage may touch:

- Experiences of being judged
- Disability and lived experience
- Spiritual deconstruction or reconstruction
- Church hurt

If vulnerability emerges:

- Honor it.
- Avoid correction or theological repair.
- Offer prayer grounded in light and grace.
- Follow up privately if needed.

Spiritual sight unfolds gently.

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## Leader Reflection Before Closing

After the gathering, reflect:

- Where did I notice misunderstanding soften?
- Did someone share something that requires care?
- What new sight is God offering me personally?

Growth in clarity rarely happens in a single moment. Trust the unfolding.

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## Week 7 – Leader Preparation

### Raising Lazarus

**Theme: Resurrection Hope**

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### Big Idea

This final sign brings us face-to-face with grief, delay, and death. Jesus does not hurry past sorrow. He listens, weeps, and enters fully into human pain. Yet He also speaks a word that calls life out of the tomb. Resurrection here is not denial of suffering; it is God's decisive act within it. This week invites participants to consider where hope feels impossible — and what it means to trust Christ's voice even there

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### The Movement of the Text

- News of illness
- Delay and confusion
- Honest grief from Martha and Mary
- Jesus' declaration: "I am the resurrection and the life."
- Jesus weeping
- The stone removed
- A command to come out
- Community involvement: "Unbind him."

Hold the arc: **loss** → **delay** → **lament** → **revelation** → **command** → **new life** → **communal responsibility**.

Notice that resurrection involves both divine action and communal participation.

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## Emotional Landscape

Participants may resonate with:

- Grief that still feels fresh
- Questions about God's delay
- Longing for restoration that seems impossible
- Fear of death — literal or symbolic

Be attentive to:

- Those grieving recent loss
- Participants who carry unresolved sorrow
- Quiet emotional responses
- Spiritual exhaustion

This week may bring tears. Let the room be tender.

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## Theological Anchors

- Jesus does not avoid grief; He enters it
- Delay does not equal indifference.
- Resurrection is both present and future reality.
- The community participates in unbinding what Christ raises.

Keep this grounding but spacious.

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## Suggested Flow of the Gathering

### 75-Minute Model

Welcome and Opening Prayer – 5 minutes  
Read John 11:1–44 Slowly (or selected portions) – 7 minutes  
Silence – 3 minutes  
Discussion Questions – 30–35 minutes  
Going Deeper – 15 minutes  
Personal Reflection – 8–10 minutes  
Closing Prayer – 5 minutes

Do not rush this week. Silence may be particularly meaningful.

### 60-Minute Model (If Needed)

Welcome and Prayer – 5 minutes  
Scripture Reading – 7 minutes  
Core Discussion – 35 minutes  
Reflection and Prayer – 13 minutes

Keep the tone reverent.

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## Gentle Prompts if Conversation Slows

- “What stands out to you in Jesus’ response to grief?”
- “Why do you think Jesus delays?”
- “What does ‘I am the resurrection and the life’ mean today?”
- “Where in your life feels tomb-like?”
- “Who might need help being unbound?”

If conversation becomes overly abstract about doctrine, gently return:  
“What does this mean for how we live now?”

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## Watch For

- Offering simplistic explanations for death or suffering.
- Minimizing grief with quick references to hope.
- Forcing participants to name personal loss.
- Turning resurrection into debate rather than encounter.

Let lament and hope coexist.

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## Pastoral Awareness

This passage may touch:

- Recent bereavement
- Long-term grief
- Fear of death
- Spiritual numbness

If strong emotion surfaces:

- Slow the room.
- Speak gently.
- Offer silence before prayer.
- Follow up privately if appropriate.

Resurrection hope is not loud triumph; it is steady promise.

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## Leader Reflection Before Closing

After the gathering, reflect:

- Where did grief surface?
- Did someone share something that requires care?
- Where am I personally longing for resurrection?

As this study concludes, trust that seeds have been planted. Growth may not be immediate, but it is real.

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## Appendix

### Leader Reference and Support Materials

## Understanding “Signs” in the Gospel of John

John does not use the word “miracle” in the same way the other Gospels do. Instead, he uses the word “sign.” A sign points beyond itself. It reveals something deeper than the event alone.

In this study, the seven signs are not simply demonstrations of power. They are revelations of identity. Each one reveals who Jesus is and how God’s life is unfolding among us

When leading discussion, remember:

- The goal is not to prove the miracle happened.
- The goal is not to debate how it happened.
- The goal is to ask: *What is this revealing about Jesus?*

In John’s Gospel:

- Water becomes wine → Transformation and abundance
- Healing across distance → Trust in the Word
- Restoration after long waiting → Courage to rise
- Feeding thousands → Provision through offering
- Walking on water → Presence in fear
- Giving sight → Growing understanding
- Raising Lazarus → Resurrection hope

The signs invite response. They do not force belief.

Encourage leaders to keep the focus on revelation rather than explanation.

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## Lent as a Season of Formation

Lent is not a season of shame. It is a season of honesty.

Ash Wednesday reminds us of our limits. Easter reminds us of God's power. Lent is the space between — where reflection, surrender, and attentiveness deepen.

In leading this study during Lent:

- Move slowly.
- Leave room for silence.
- Do not rush to resolution.
- Allow discomfort without fixing it.

Formation happens quietly.

Participants may feel:

- Tenderness
- Resistance
- Fatigue
- Unexpected clarity

All of this belongs in Lent.

Leaders are not called to manage transformation — only to create space for it.

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## Leading Mixed-Belief Groups

Not everyone who participates will be in the same place spiritually. Some may:

- Be long-time church members.
- Be returning after absence.
- Be quietly doubting.
- Be exploring faith for the first time.

As a leader:

- Avoid insider language when possible.
- Do not shame doubt.
- Welcome questions without defensiveness.
- Hold strong convictions gently.

If someone expresses uncertainty, you might respond:

“That’s an honest place to be. What does this passage stir in you?”

If someone expresses strong certainty, you might respond:

“How does this shape how you live?”

Healthy groups allow both conviction and curiosity.

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## Quick Guide: Handling Difficult Moments

Even with preparation, unexpected situations arise. Here are brief responses to common scenarios:

### **If one person dominates conversation:**

“Let’s pause and hear from someone who hasn’t spoken yet.”

### **If theological debate escalates:**

“That’s an important topic. For tonight, let’s return to what this passage reveals.”

### **If strong emotion surfaces:**

- Thank the person.
- Allow a pause.
- Offer prayer.
- Follow up privately if needed.

### **If silence feels uncomfortable:**

Do not rush it. After a moment, ask:

“What word or phrase stayed with you?”

### **If someone shares something deeply personal:**

- Do not analyze.
- Do not correct.
- Do not compare stories.
- Simply honor the sharing.

Your calm presence sets the tone.

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## Leader Self-Care Reminder

Leading sacred space requires spiritual energy.

After each gathering:

- Take five quiet minutes before moving on.
- Pray briefly for those who attended.
- Release what you cannot control.

You are not responsible for spiritual outcomes.

You are responsible for faithfulness.