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# How These Studies Were Created

A note on our use of artificial intelligence · CatholicArmory.com

Every study in this series began the old-fashioned way: with Scripture open, a question worth asking, and a desire to hear how the Church has answered it. What is new is the set of tools we used to listen.

The Catholic Church carries two thousand years of reflection on the Word of God. The Fathers of the Church, the great Doctors, the ecumenical councils, the Catechism, and the theologians of our own day form a library so vast that no one person could read it all in a lifetime. In preparing these studies, we used artificial intelligence as a research assistant to search that library: to surface what St. Augustine or St. John Chrysostom actually said about a passage, to locate the relevant paragraphs of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and to trace how a doctrine developed from the apostolic age to the present. The AI did not write our theology. It helped us find the Church's.

Because these tools are powerful but imperfect, we placed strict guardrails around their use. Every patristic quotation and Catechism reference was required to be verified against its source, never invented or embellished. Where the Church has defined a matter, we state it plainly. Where she has not, we say so honestly and refuse to speak with more certainty than she does. Our standard throughout has been complete fidelity to Catholic doctrine as taught by the Magisterium, and nothing was permitted into these pages that could not stand under that light.

We also refused to trust any single tool. Each session was cross-examined by multiple independent AI systems, each tasked with hunting for error: doctrinal imprecision or heresy, overstated claims, misattributed quotations, and the fabrications (often called hallucinations) to which these systems are prone. Where the reviewers disagreed, a human being went back to the sources and settled the question.

Finally, and most importantly, these studies were tested on people, not just machines. A group of trusted reviewers, faithful Catholics whose judgment we rely on, worked through the material session by session in trial runs, flagging anything unclear, unbalanced, or unfaithful before the studies reached their final form.

We offer this work in a spirit of service to the Church, and we submit it gladly to her judgment. If any error remains despite these efforts, the fault is ours alone. Our hope is simple: that these pages help you encounter the living Word of God, in the company of the saints who have loved Him for twenty centuries.

A CATHOLIC JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLICAL ROOTS OF THE PAPACY

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# Feed My Sheep

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*A Twelve-Session Inductive Bible Study for Young Adults*  
**Leader's Guide**

Connection · Discovery · Commission

*All Scripture quotations from the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition (RSV2CE)*

## USING THIS GUIDE

This study traces the biblical roots of the papacy from the calling of a fisherman to the servant of the servants of God. It is built for young adults, for tables of six to twelve, and for seventy-five to ninety minutes per session, in a simple inductive format: every session opens hearts, digs into the text with real discovery, and sends participants out with something concrete.

### THE THREE PARTS OF EVERY SESSION

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**Part One, the Leader Preparation Guide,** is for you alone: the Discovery Aim and Catholic Touchstone, What You Need to Know, Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment, three Voices of the Church with verified citations, the Catechism Connection, Thread Watch, numbered Session Goals, and a Time Note with pre-chosen cuts for short nights.

**Part Two, the Discussion Guide,** is the session itself: opening prayer, two open Win questions, the numbered Build questions with shaded ANSWER boxes, live discovery moments, Dig Deeper boxes, two Send questions, Live It This Week practices, closing prayer, and the Scripture memory verse.

**Part Three, the Leader Reference Card,** lists every passage the session uses, in order, so you can flag your Bible before the group arrives.

### THE RULES THAT MAKE IT WORK

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**Honor the ANSWER boxes.** Each shaded box is labeled share after the discussion, and the label is the method: ask the question, endure the silence, let the group dig, and only then share what the box holds. The night a leader lectures the boxes is the night discovery dies.

**Protect the live discoveries.** At marked moments, participants find Old Testament and New Testament passages with their own hands, most of all the hunt of Session Three. Never reveal a discovery passage in advance; the thunderclap is the catechesis.

**Play the steelmen straight.** Where the guide presents a Protestant reading, present it at full strength, as its best defenders would, before pressing with the text. Weak opponents teach nothing; honored ones teach everything.

**Guard the seals.** Take-Home 1 carries two sealed guesses, opened at Sessions Three and Six. Make the sealing ceremonial, defend it weekly, and celebrate the openings. The threads are half the joy of the study.

### PARTICIPANT MATERIALS

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There is no participant journal. The only handout is the two-page Take-Home sheet distributed at the end of each session: What We Found, that session's Voices of the Church, Live It This Week, the memory verse, the Before Next Session reading, and Catechism references. Take-Homes never contain ANSWER content, upcoming discovery passages, Thread Watch notes, or steelman material; participants should meet everything for the first time at the table.

A daily habit runs through the whole study and is worth enforcing gently: one Our Father each day for the pope and his intentions, with a weekly addition given in Live It This Week. By Session Twelve it will have become permanent, which is the idea.

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*Take-Home sheets for Sessions One through Twelve are provided as a separate participant packet.*

## SESSION ONE

# The Fisherman

*John 1:35-42; Luke 5:1-11*

## PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Discovery Aim:** Participants discover that Jesus renames Simon at their very first meeting, that in Scripture a God-given name change always carries a covenant mission, and that Simon's call from the fishing boats begins a transformation whose destination the Gospels will only slowly reveal.

**Catholic Touchstone:** Vocation. Grace builds on nature and calls the unlikely: Jesus chooses a working fisherman, renames him before he has done anything to deserve it, and begins shaping him for an office the whole study will uncover (CCC 551).

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The renaming happens at first sight. In John 1:42, before Simon has said a recorded word, Jesus looks at him and declares: "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). *Kepha* is Aramaic for rock; *Petros* is its Greek rendering. Jesus does not describe Simon; he assigns him a future. No one else in the Gospels receives a new name this way. Jesus does surname James and John *Boanerges*, "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17), but that nickname never displaces their names. Peter becomes his dominant name, so dominant that most Christians forget he ever had another, though "Simon" and "Simon Peter" remain in use, including on Jesus' own lips at pivotal moments (Matthew 16:17; Luke 22:31; John 21:15).

As a personal name, *Kepha* is all but unattested before Jesus; the same is essentially true of *Petros*. Jesus did not pick a common name off the shelf. He coined one, roughly like naming a man Boulder. When Scripture does something this strange, the strangeness is the message, and this study exists to unpack it.

The pattern of divine renaming is ancient and consistent: Abram becomes Abraham, "father of a multitude" (Genesis 17:5); Jacob becomes Israel (Genesis 32:28). When God renames, God commissions, and the new name is the job description. Tonight the group discovers the pattern; what mission the name Rock carries is next session's summit. Do not front-run it.

Luke 5:1-11 gives the call in full color. Notice whose boat Jesus chooses to teach from: Simon's, specifically (5:3). Then the impossible catch, and Simon's collapse: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (5:8). Jesus answers the confession with a commission: "Do not be afraid; henceforth you

will be catching men" (5:10). Confessed sinfulness is not a disqualifier in Scripture; it is regularly step one of a vocation. Hold that pattern; it returns with force late in this study.

Peter's sheer prominence in the New Testament is itself data. He is named nearly two hundred times, several times more than any other apostle. In every list of the Twelve he is first and Judas is last, and Matthew makes it explicit: "first, Simon, who is called Peter" (Matthew 10:2), *prōtos*, though he was not the first called chronologically. The evangelists, writing decades later in different communities, all agree on the spotlight, including its harshest moments. Whatever the Gospels think Peter is, they think it loudly.

One more early thread: St. Paul, writing Greek to Greek-speaking churches, still calls him *Kephas* again and again (1 Corinthians 1:12; 15:5; Galatians 1:18; 2:9). The Aramaic name traveled the whole Mediterranean untranslated. Everyone knew who the Rock was.

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## OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

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**Genesis 17:5 and 32:28.** God renames Abram and Jacob at covenant hinge points, and each new name carries the mission: father of a multitude, striver with God. Divine renaming is never cosmetic. Tonight's live discovery.

**Isaiah 6:1-8.** Isaiah sees the Lord, cries "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips," is cleansed, and only then hears and answers the sending. Encounter, confession, reassurance, commission: the same essential sequence as Luke 5, though Isaiah alone receives the cleansing coal; in Luke, Jesus' "Do not be afraid" carries the reassurance.

**Jeremiah 16:16.** "Behold, I am sending for many fishers, says the LORD, and they shall catch them." In Jeremiah's immediate context the fishers seek out a sinful people whom God will not let escape (16:17-18), yet the oracle stands directly after the promise of a new exodus regathering Israel from all the lands (16:14-15). Fishing for people is God's own language for seeking out his scattered people, in judgment and in mercy. When Jesus says "catching men," he takes up that prophetic image and turns it wholly to good news: the great regathering has begun, and Simon is hired.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. John Chrysostom** *Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homily 19*

Preaching on John 1:42, Chrysostom marvels that the Lord declares Simon's future name at their first meeting. By telling him what he shall be called, Christ shows both his divine foreknowledge and his intent: he is already shaping the fisherman into what the name promises, beginning the work before Simon has taken a single step.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Ambrose** *Exposition of the Gospel of Luke, Book IV*

Ambrose lingers over the detail that Jesus teaches the crowd from Simon's boat. It was fitting, he says, that the Lord should teach from Peter's vessel: in that boat Ambrose sees a figure of the Church, from which Christ instructs the world, and the deep water into which Simon is told to launch is the depth of the mission still ahead.

#### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Irenaeus of Lyons** *Against Heresies, Book III*

Irenaeus records that Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, handed down in writing what Peter had preached. If that early tradition is right, then the vivid, humbling detail of Peter's story in Mark's Gospel, most of it unflattering, goes back to Peter's own preaching, which would mean the Rock told the Church his failures himself. Irenaeus does not draw that conclusion; it follows from the tradition he preserves, and it is its own kind of credential.

#### CATECHISM CONNECTION

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**CCC 551** teaches that when Jesus chose the Twelve to share in his mission and authority, he gave Simon a unique place within them, a place this study will trace text by text.

**CCC 858-860** presents the apostles as sent ones who carry Christ's own mission and make him present, the foundation on which everything later in this study stands.

**CCC 1, 27** frame the deeper point of tonight's call narrative: God freely calls human beings into his own life, and every vocation, Simon's included, begins in that initiative, not in human worthiness.

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#### THREAD WATCH

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**The Fisherman-to-Shepherd thread (plant tonight, resolve Session Six).** Simon enters the story as a fisherman and is commissioned to catch men. Before the Gospels end, Jesus will hand him a different job with a different image entirely, and it is the title of this study. Say nothing. Take-Home 1's first sealed blank asks the group to guess the job; it opens at Session Six.

**The Job Posting thread (sealed guess, resolves Session Three).** Hidden in the Old Testament is a detailed job description for the office Jesus will give Simon, keys included. Take-Home 1's second blank asks which prophet's book it hides in. It opens at Session Three, and the discovery is the summit of the study's first half. Guard Isaiah 22 completely until then.

**The Confessed Sinner thread.** "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man" plants a pattern that returns at Session Nine, when the study faces Peter's failures head-on. Tonight, just make sure the Luke 5 sequence (encounter, confession, reassurance, commission) is clearly seen.

#### SESSION GOALS

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1.

Establish the group covenant and the session rhythm, and name the study's driving question: what exactly did Jesus build on this particular man?

2.

Discover the renaming at John 1:42 and its Old Testament grammar through Genesis 17 and 32.

3.

Trace the Luke 5 call sequence and its Isaiah 6 pattern: confessed sin precedes commission.

4.

Distribute Take-Home 1 and make the double sealed guess ceremonial.

### TIME NOTE

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75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, cut Build 8 and compress the Peter-statistics question (Build 7) into a leader statement. Do not cut the sealed guess instructions; both threads depend on them.

## PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Opening Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, you looked at a fisherman and saw a rock. You call the unlikely, you rename the unready, and you build with what the world overlooks. As we begin this study, give us Simon's honesty about our sin and Simon's readiness to leave the nets. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

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1.

Do you have a nickname, or have you ever given one that stuck? What does it take for a name to actually replace someone's name?

2.

Think of a time someone saw potential in you that you could not yet see in yourself. What did their confidence do to you?

### BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

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1.

Read John 1:35-42. Andrew finds his brother and brings him to Jesus. Watch verse 42 closely: what does Jesus do before Simon has said a single recorded word, and what is strange about it?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Jesus looks at him and renames him on the spot: "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). No interview, no trial period. The name is declared at first sight, as a future: "you shall be called."

No one else in the Gospels receives a new name this way. James and John get the nickname *Boanerges*, sons of thunder (Mark 3:17), but it never displaces their names. Peter becomes his dominant name from here on, so dominant that most people forget he was ever anyone else, even though "Simon" still appears at key moments. Jesus is not describing this man; he is assigning him something.

**2.**

LIVE DISCOVERY. Two readers: find Genesis 17:5 and Genesis 32:28. In Scripture, when God changes someone's name, what always comes with the new name? So what should we expect the name Rock to carry?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Abram becomes Abraham because God is making him "the father of a multitude of nations": the name is the covenant role. Jacob becomes Israel at the hinge of his life. Divine renaming is never a rebrand; the new name is the commission, spoken before it is achieved.

So the name Rock must carry a mission, and the honest answer tonight is that we do not yet know what it is. The Gospels will define it, and so will this study. Resist the urge to skip ahead; the discovery is worth the wait.

**3.**

Here is a strange fact: as far as the surviving records show, *Kepha* was all but unheard of as a personal name before Jesus used it, and the same is essentially true of the Greek *Petros*. What does it tell us that Jesus coined a name rather than choosing one?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

It would be roughly like renaming a friend Boulder. Nobody was named Rock, which means Jesus was not reaching for something familiar; he was creating a designation that had no history and therefore no meaning except the one he would give it.

That also means every later reader has to ask the question the way the first hearers did: not "which Rock is he?" but "what is a Rock for?" Buildings come to mind. Hold that thought until next week.

**4.**

Read Luke 5:1-3. Two boats are sitting there. Whose boat does Jesus get into to teach the crowd, and does Luke bother to tell us? Why might that detail matter?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Luke names it: "getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's," he taught the people from it. Of two available boats, the Lord teaches from Simon's, and Luke thought the detail worth preserving.

St. Ambrose loved this verse: he saw in Peter's boat a figure of the Church, the vessel from which Christ teaches the world. Whether or not every hearer goes that far tonight, the pattern is beginning: when Jesus wants a platform, he keeps choosing this particular fisherman's things, and eventually this particular fisherman.

## 5.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Read Luke 5:4-8. The catch happens, and Simon falls down: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Someone find and read Isaiah 6:1-8. What sequence do the two scenes share?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Isaiah sees the Lord and cries "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips." A coal touches his mouth, guilt departs, and only then comes "Whom shall I send?" and "Here am I! Send me."

Encounter, confession of sin, reassurance, commission. Luke 5 runs the same sequence, minus the coal (Jesus' own word "Do not be afraid" does the reassuring): glory, "I am a sinful man," "do not be afraid," "henceforth you will be catching men."

Notice what the pattern means: in Scripture, confessed sinfulness is not the end of a vocation; it is routinely the beginning of one. In these call narratives, God's call lands precisely on people who know their sin; honesty about unworthiness, not self-assurance, is the recurring starting point. Remember this sequence; this study will need it badly in a few weeks.

## 6.

LIVE DISCOVERY. "Catching men" sounds like a metaphor Jesus made up on the beach. Someone find and read Jeremiah 16:16. Where does the image actually come from, and what was it for?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

"Behold, I am sending for many fishers, says the LORD, and they shall catch them." In Jeremiah the image cuts two ways: the fishers seek out a people who cannot hide from God, yet it stands beside God's promise to bring his scattered people home (16:14-15). Fishing for people is prophetic language for God seeking out Israel.

So when Jesus says "henceforth you will be catching men," he is not coining a cute image; he is announcing that the promised regathering has begun and hiring Simon into it. The fisherman's nets were always pointed at this.

## 7.

Some quick data. Peter is named nearly two hundred times in the New Testament, several times more than any other apostle. Every list of the Twelve puts him first, and Matthew writes "first, Simon, who is called Peter" (Matthew 10:2) even though Andrew met Jesus before he did. What do we make of the spotlight?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Four evangelists, writing decades apart for different communities, all agree on where the light falls, and the word Matthew uses, *prōtos*, is not about chronology, since Simon was not called first. It marks position.

And the spotlight is not flattery: no figure in the Gospels is corrected, humbled, and exposed as often as Peter, and according to the early tradition St. Irenaeus preserves, Mark's Gospel records Peter's own preaching, which would mean Peter told these stories on himself. The prominence is not a legend growing later; it is the memory of the whole apostolic Church, failures included. The question this study asks is what that prominence is *for*.

**8.**

Last one, and let it breathe: Jesus renamed Simon before Simon had done anything, right or wrong. He commissioned him seconds after Simon confessed to being a sinful man. What does that tell us about how God calls, and about what disqualifies a person?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Let the group work. The landing: God's call is initiative, not recruitment of the already qualified. Grace precedes; the name comes before the worthiness; the commission comes right through the confession. "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16) is the grammar of every vocation in Scripture.

That means the disqualification most of us fear, our record, is precisely what the pattern refuses to treat as final. This study is about an office, but the office is built on a called sinner, and that is not an embarrassment to the design. It is the design.

**SEND · TAKING IT WITH US**

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**1.**

Jesus saw a rock in a fisherman. What might he see in you that you have trouble seeing? Say it to him this week, even if you cannot yet believe it.

**2.**

Simon's call started when his brother Andrew simply brought him to Jesus. Who is one person you could be Andrew for this month?

**LIVE IT THIS WEEK**

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**1.**

Look up the meaning of your baptismal or confirmation name this week, and pray each morning: "Lord, you knew my name before I did; make me what you named me."

**2.**

Read Luke 5:1-11 once more on your own, slowly, placing yourself in the boat. Write down the one line that lands hardest.

### 3.

Begin a habit this study will keep: pray one Our Father each day for the pope and his intentions. You do not have to feel anything about the papacy yet; just pray for the man.

#### Closing Prayer:

*Father, you renamed Abram, you renamed Jacob, and your Son renamed Simon. You call before we are ready and you build with sinners who tell you the truth. Put out into the deep with us. Teach from our little boats. And make us unafraid of what you intend to call us. Amen.*

**Scripture Memory Verse:** "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter)." (John 1:42, RSV2CE)

## PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session One, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

### PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Main text one, Build 1: the renaming at first sight

#### Mark 3:17

Leader background, Build 1: Boanerges contrast

#### Genesis 17:5

Live discovery, Build 2: Abram to Abraham

#### Genesis 32:28

Live discovery, Build 2: Jacob to Israel

#### Luke 5:1-11

Main text two, Builds 4-5: the boat, the catch, the call

#### Isaiah 6:1-8

Live discovery, Build 5: confession before commission

#### Jeremiah 16:16

Live discovery, Build 6: fishers sent to regather Israel

**Matthew 10:2**

Build 7: "first, Simon, who is called Peter"

**1 Corinthians 1:12; 15:5; Galatians 1:18; 2:9**

Leader background: Paul says Kephas

**John 15:16**

Build 8: you did not choose me

**CCC 551; 858-860; 1; 27**

Catechism Connection

## SESSION TWO

# Upon This Rock

*Matthew 16:13-20*

## PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Discovery Aim:** Participants discover why Jesus staged this scene at Caesarea Philippi, that Peter's confession is revealed rather than deduced, and that Jesus answers the confession with three gifts: the name fulfilled, the Church founded on the rock, and the keys promised. The strongest Protestant reading of "this rock" gets its full day in court.

**Catholic Touchstone:** The Church built on Peter. "On the rock of this faith confessed by St. Peter, Christ built his Church" (CCC 424; 552): Peter and his confession are not rival foundations but one, the confessor made rock precisely as confessing.

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Location is the first sermon. Caesarea Philippi sat twenty-five miles north of Galilee, pagan territory, at the foot of a colossal rock cliff. Built into that cliff was the grotto of the god Pan, with niches for idols still visible today, and a gleaming temple Herod had built for the divinized Caesar. Many modern commentators note that the cave there has long been associated with the underworld. Jesus hikes the Twelve two days out of their way to ask his question in front of a giant rock face crowded with dead gods and a self-deified emperor. Matthew does not tell us why Jesus chose this district, but the staging reads as deliberate: against that backdrop, "the Son of the living God" lands like thunder.

Two questions structure the scene: "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" draws a poll (the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah); "But who do you say that I am?" draws a confession. Simon answers for the Twelve, as he habitually does; St. John Chrysostom calls him "the mouth of the apostles." The confession is total: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus' first response is about the answer's *source*: "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (16:17). Peter's confession is a grace, a revelation received, not a deduction achieved. File this carefully: when the Church later speaks of a charism protecting Peter's confession of the faith, the root is here, in a truth the Father, not talent, put in Peter's mouth.

Then the name given at first sight (John 1:42) receives its job description: "you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." Jesus was almost certainly speaking Aramaic, and in Aramaic the wordplay would use a single word where our translations have two: you are Kepha, and on this kepha I will build.

(The New Testament itself preserves the Aramaic name: Paul routinely calls Peter Cephas, and John 1:42 records the naming in Aramaic.) Matthew's Greek renders the name *Petros* because a man needs a masculine name, and the common noun *petra*. The old argument that *petros* means a small stone while *petra* means bedrock belongs mainly to older Attic poetry; the distinction had largely faded in the Koine Greek of the New Testament, and it never existed in Aramaic at all.

Be ready to be more honest than the pamphlets on both sides. St. Augustine himself, in his *Retractations*, notes that he had expounded the rock both ways in his career, as Peter and as the Christ Peter confessed, and explicitly leaves the choice to the reader. The Catechism happily speaks both ways too (CCC 424 and 552). The Catholic claim is not that the confession reading is forbidden; it is that Peter-as-rock is what the wordplay says, and that the two readings converge: Peter is the rock precisely as the graced confessor of the true faith. The steelman chain at Build 5 and 6 walks this honestly.

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"I will build my church": *ekklēsia* appears in the Gospels only here and at Matthew 18:17. In the Greek Old Testament it renders the *qahal*, the covenant assembly of Israel. Jesus is not founding a club; he is announcing the rebuilt assembly of God with a new foundation stone.

"The powers of death shall not prevail against it" (16:18, RSV2CE) translates the Greek "gates of Hades." Gates are defensive architecture, so many readers see the image reversed: not the Church holding out under siege, but death's fortress failing to hold against the Church's advance. At minimum, the promise is that death will never overcome or hold the Church. And a promise of perpetuity quietly implies something about the foundation: a Church that death cannot end is built on a rock that death cannot remove. Let that sit unexplained tonight; Session Ten will collect it.

The keys (16:19) are tonight's cliffhanger, and protecting them is your hardest leadership task of the study. Where keys come from, whose job it is to carry them in a kingdom, and the Old Testament job posting behind them: all of that is Session Three's live discovery, and the sealed guess depends on it. Tonight you may only point at the keys and smile.

## OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

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**Isaiah 51:1-2.** "Look to the rock from which you were hewn... look to Abraham your father." Scripture itself calls a renamed patriarch the rock from which the covenant people were quarried. If Abraham can be the people's rock without rivaling the God who is the Rock (Deuteronomy 32:4), so can Kepha. Tonight's key live discovery for the steelman.

**Psalms 118:22 and Isaiah 28:16.** The rejected stone made head of the corner, the tested cornerstone laid in Zion: Scripture's rock imagery is rich and layered, and the New Testament uses all of it, Christ the cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4-8), the apostles the foundation courses (Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14). The question is never whether rock imagery can apply to others under Christ; Scripture plainly does it. The question is what this particular sentence says.

**2 Samuel 7:12-16.** The Davidic covenant: an everlasting house, a kingdom that shall not fail. "Christ" is a Davidic royal title, and "Son of God" carries Davidic overtones (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7), even as Peter's confession surpasses them, naming Jesus' unique divine sonship (CCC 442). The Davidic register

makes the scene a kingdom scene, and kingdoms have structures. That observation is the bridge to Session Three; walk onto it but not across it.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. John Chrysostom** *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, Homily 54*

Chrysostom calls Peter the mouth of the apostles, the one who answers when all are asked, and he marvels at the exchange of confessions: Peter confesses Jesus to be the Son of the living God, and Jesus confesses what Peter shall be, pronouncing blessing on him and founding what no time will overthrow.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Cyprian of Carthage** *On the Unity of the Catholic Church, 4*

Cyprian teaches that although the Lord gave power to all the apostles, he built the Church upon one, and by beginning from one made her unity visible. The other apostles were what Peter was, Cyprian says, but the primacy is given to Peter so that the Church of Christ may be shown to be one, a single origin for a single flock.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Leo the Great** *Sermon 4, On His Birthday as Pope*

Leo preaches that the strength given to the rock does not fail: in Peter's see, what Peter confessed and what Peter received remain at work, so that the solidity Christ granted the fisherman endures in the office. The Lord, Leo insists, remains the true builder; Peter is strong because Christ makes him so, and never apart from him.

## CATECHISM CONNECTION

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**CCC 552** states it plainly: because of the faith he confessed, Peter will remain the unshakable rock of the Church, whose mission is to keep that faith from every eclipse and strengthen his brothers in it.

**CCC 424** gives the other half of the same coin: on the rock of this faith confessed by St. Peter, Christ built his Church. The Church reads Peter and his confession together, never as rivals.

**CCC 442** notes that Peter's confession of the divine sonship, received by revelation from the Father, is the faith the Church has proclaimed from the beginning, beginning with Paul's own preaching.

## THREAD WATCH

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**The Job Posting thread nears its payoff.** The keys are promised tonight and explained next week. Expect someone to ask where the key imagery comes from; the only correct answer is a grin and "bring your sealed sheet next week." If anyone starts flipping toward the prophets, land the plane fast.

**The Fisherman-to-Shepherd thread develops silently.** "I will build my church" tells us Simon's mission involves a structure, but the animal changes later. First blank stays sealed until Session Six.

**The Revealed Confession thread plants tonight.** "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you" (16:17) is the acorn of everything the Church will later say about a charism protecting Peter's confession. It resolves at Session Twelve; tonight it only needs to be noticed and underlined.

## SESSION GOALS

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### 1.

See the staging: why Caesarea Philippi, and what the rock cliff full of dead gods does to the scene.

### 2.

Discover that Peter's confession is revealed, not deduced (16:17), and mark it for the study's final session.

### 3.

Walk the *Petros/petra* steelman at full strength, including Augustine's honesty, and resolve it with the Aramaic and with Isaiah 51.

### 4.

Leave the keys deliberately unexplained, protecting Session Three's discovery.

## TIME NOTE

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75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, compress Build 1's scene-setting and cut Build 8. Protect Builds 5 and 6 at all costs; the steelman chain is the doctrinal heart of the night. End with the keys cliffhanger no matter what.

## PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Opening Prayer:

*Father in heaven, flesh and blood cannot show us your Son; only you can. Reveal him to us tonight as you revealed him to Simon: the Christ, the Son of the living God. And build in us what you build on rock: a faith the powers of death cannot shake. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

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1.

Where do you go, or what kind of place do you pick, when you need to have a really important conversation? Why does setting matter?

2.

If someone asked the people who know you best "who do they say you are," what would the poll results be, and how close would they get?

## BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

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1.

Read Matthew 16:13. Jesus has walked the Twelve twenty-five miles north into pagan territory to ask his question. Here is what stood at Caesarea Philippi: a colossal rock cliff, a cave shrine to the god Pan carved into it, idol niches in the stone, and a temple to the divinized Caesar. Why stage the question *here*?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Because the setting is a sermon. Against a giant rock face crowded with dead gods and a self-deified emperor, Jesus asks who he is, and Peter's answer, "the Son of the *living* God," detonates against everything behind him. Many interpreters have associated the grotto there with the underworld, which makes the coming line about the powers of death local color, not abstraction.

Jesus chooses his classrooms. Whatever he is about to found, he founds it staring down every rival claim to deity and every empire built on stone, and the setting could hardly be more fitting.

2.

Read 16:14-16. Two questions: what do the crowds say, and what does Peter say? Notice also *who* answers when all twelve are asked.

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

The crowd's poll is flattering and wrong: the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, a prophet. Respectful categories, all too small. Peter's confession is total: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Messiah, and Son, of the God who lives.

And it is Peter who answers for the group, as he does over and over in the Gospels; St. John Chrysostom calls him the mouth of the apostles. Twelve were asked; one habitually speaks. The Gospels never explain this arrangement; they simply keep showing it to us. Keep counting the pattern as the study goes on.

3.

Read 16:17. Before any names or rocks, Jesus makes a claim about where Peter's answer came from. What is the source of the confession, and why does that matter?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

"Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." Peter did not reason his way to the confession or intuit it by talent. It was revealed; he received it. The truest thing Peter ever said was a grace before it was a statement.

Underline this verse in your Bibles, literally. Much later, this study will ask how a fisherman's successors could possibly be protected in confessing the faith, and the seed of every answer is here: the confession was never sourced in flesh and blood to begin with. For now, just notice it and remember it.

#### 4.

Read 16:18 slowly. Last week Jesus coined a name at first sight and left it undefined. What happens to the name tonight, and what is the Old Testament grammar of that (think Genesis 17)?

##### ANSWER · share after the discussion

The name gets its job description. "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church": *Kepha* finally learns what he is for. Just as Abram's new name carried its mission inside it, father of a multitude, Simon's new name turns out to be a building specification.

Notice too what Jesus says he will build: "my church," *ekklēsia*, the word the Greek Old Testament uses for the covenant assembly of Israel. This is not the founding of a club; it is the rebuilt assembly of God, and Jesus names its foundation stone out loud.

#### 5.

Steelman time, and this one deserves our best. A Protestant friend says: "The rock is not Peter. In Greek, Peter is *petros*, a stone, but Jesus builds on the *petra*, bedrock, meaning Peter's confession, or Christ himself. Peter himself calls Christ the cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4-8), and Paul says no other foundation can be laid than Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11)." Make that case as strongly as he would. What is it seeing correctly?

##### ANSWER · share after the discussion

It sees plenty. Scripture's rock imagery is gloriously flexible: Christ is the cornerstone, the apostles together are foundation courses (Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14), and only God is the Rock in the absolute sense (Deuteronomy 32:4). Any reading that makes Peter a rival foundation to Christ deserves to lose. And the confession really is central to the scene; Jesus blesses Peter precisely as confessor. Even St. Augustine, in his *Retractations*, admits he preached the rock both ways across his career and leaves the reader free. Catholics should say all of this cheerfully, because the Catechism itself speaks both ways (CCC 424, 552).

Having granted all that, three problems remain for the "not Peter" reading, and we will take them one at a time in the next question.

#### 6.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Now press. Problem one: what language was Jesus actually speaking, and what happens to the two-word argument in it? Problem two: read 16:17-19 and count the pronouns: who is

every single gift addressed to? Then someone find and read Isaiah 51:1-2 for problem three: can a mere man be called the rock of God's people without blasphemy?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

One: Jesus spoke Aramaic, and in Aramaic the wordplay runs on one word, not two: you are Kepha, and on this kepha I will build. Matthew's Greek uses *Petros* for the name simply because a man needs a masculine noun. The small-stone versus bedrock distinction belongs mainly to older Attic poetry and had largely faded from the everyday Greek of the New Testament. The wordplay only works at all if the rock is the man just renamed; otherwise Jesus coined a name for nothing.

Two: every gift in 16:17-19 is second person singular: blessed are *you*, I tell *you*, *you* are Peter, I will give *you* the keys, whatever *you* bind. The paragraph is a torrent aimed at one man. Three: Isaiah settles the propriety question: "Look to the rock from which you were hewn... look to Abraham your father." Scripture itself calls a renamed patriarch the quarry of the covenant people, with no insult to the God who is the Rock. Abraham could be it; Kepha can be it. And here is the peace treaty: the readings converge. Peter is the rock as the graced confessor of 16:17. Take away the confession and there is no rock; take away the man and there is nothing to build on. The Church has never had to choose.

**7.**

Read 16:18 again, the last clause: "and the powers of death shall not prevail against it." The Greek behind that phrase is "gates of Hades." Think about gates for a second: are gates offensive or defensive weapons? So which direction is this battle moving?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Gates defend. Gates have never once charged across a battlefield. So many readers see the image reversed: not the poor Church huddled under siege, but death's own fortress failing to hold as the Church advances on it. However the picture is drawn, the promise is the same: death's gates lose; death will never overcome the Church.

Now quietly notice what perpetuity implies. A Church that death can never end stands on a foundation that death can never remove. How exactly a foundation outlives a mortal fisherman is a question tonight deliberately leaves open. Sit with the itch; the study will scratch it.

**DIG DEEPER · A kingdom needs more than a king**

"Christ" is a royal, Davidic title, and "Son of God" echoes the promises to David's line (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 2:7), even as Peter's confession reaches beyond dynasty to divine sonship. Peter has just confessed Jesus as the Davidic King, and Jesus immediately responds with kingdom architecture: an assembly, a foundation, and, in the next verse, keys. Ancient Near Eastern kingdoms were not one-man shows; they had structures, officers, and one office in particular that Israel's readers knew well. Naming it tonight would spoil next week. Just register that when the King starts handing out keys, he is doing something with a history.

**8.**

Read 16:19, and then we stop, I promise: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Do not answer these tonight, just feel their weight: in a kingdom, where do keys come from? Whose job is it to carry them? And has anyone in Scripture ever held keys like this before?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Tonight's only correct answer is the cliffhanger itself. There is an exact Old Testament job posting behind this verse, keys included, and one week from now this group is going to find it with their own hands, and someone at this table may have already guessed where it is. Sealed sheets stay sealed.

Leaders: whatever you do, do not relieve the tension. If the group leaves tonight mildly annoyed at you and itching to search the prophets, Session Three will be the best night of the study. The one thing you may say: kings do not carry their own keys.

**9.**

Verse 20 is strange after all this glory: "he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ." Why the gag order?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Because Messiah meant tanks and thrones to that generation, and Jesus' road runs through a cross. The confession is true but not yet tellable; it needs Good Friday and Easter before it can be preached without being misheard, and the very next scene (16:21-23) proves the point when Peter himself cannot accept a suffering Christ.

There is a pastoral edge for us: even true things about Jesus can be weaponized or distorted when severed from the cross. The Church Peter anchors is not a victory-parade Church; she is founded in the shadow of a confession that had to wait for Calvary to make sense.

**SEND · TAKING IT WITH US**

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**1.**

"Who do you say that I am?" is still the question under every other question. If Jesus asked you tonight, with no crowd to hide in, what would your honest answer be, and what is it costing you lately?

**2.**

Peter's greatest moment was received, not achieved: "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you." Where do you need to stop grinding for certainty and start asking the Father to reveal?

**LIVE IT THIS WEEK**

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**1.**

Pray with Matthew 16:13-20 once this week using *lectio divina*: read it three times slowly and answer the Lord's question out loud, alone, in your own words.

2.

Find a photo of the rock cliff and Pan grotto at Caesarea Philippi (search Banias, Israel) and look at it while rereading the passage. Note what changes when you can see the stage.

3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, and add one line in your own words asking Christ to keep his Church unshaken this week.

**Closing Prayer:**

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, against every dead god and every proud empire, we confess you. You build what death cannot take. Build our faith on rock this week: not on moods, not on performance, on rock. And teach us to wait well for what you have not yet shown us. Amen.*

**Scripture Memory Verse:** "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18, RSV2CE)

## PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Two, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

### PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Main text, read in sections through the Build

#### Isaiah 51:1-2

Live discovery, Build 6: Abraham called the rock

#### 1 Peter 2:4-8; 1 Corinthians 3:11

Build 5 steelman: Christ the cornerstone and foundation

#### Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14

Build 5: apostles as foundation courses

#### Deuteronomy 32:4

Build 5: God the Rock in the absolute sense

#### Genesis 17:5

Build 4 callback: renaming carries mission

**2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 2:7**

Dig Deeper: Davidic kingship behind the titles

**Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 28:16**

Leader background: Scripture's layered stone imagery

**Matthew 16:21-23**

Build 9: why the messianic secret

**CCC 424; 442; 552**

Catechism Connection and Build 5-6 resolution

## SESSION THREE

# The Keys of the House

*Isaiah 22:15-25; Matthew 16:19*

## PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Discovery Aim:** Participants discover with their own hands the Old Testament job posting behind the keys: the office of royal steward over the house of David, invested with robe, authority, fatherhood, and the key that opens and none shall shut. They find that the office had succession built into it, and that Jesus, the Davidic King, installed Peter in it.

**Catholic Touchstone:** The papacy as an office in the kingdom, not a personal honor. Christ, who holds the key of David forever (Revelation 3:7), delegates without abdicating: the pope is the steward and vicar of a living King, never his replacement (CCC 553; 881).

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Tonight is the summit of the study's first half, and its power depends entirely on discovery. The group opens the second sealed blank, then hunts Isaiah 22 live. Do not lecture this passage; deal it out and let them find "the key of the house of David" themselves. If you narrate it in advance you will have traded a thunderclap for a footnote.

The office in question: in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, one officer stood next to the king, called the one "over the household," in Hebrew *'al ha-bayit*. He appears across the historical books: Ahishar over the household under Solomon (1 Kings 4:6), Obadiah under Ahab (1 Kings 18:3), and Eliakim under Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:18). He was the royal steward, the vizier: chief officer of the palace, administrator of the kingdom in the king's name, second only to the throne. Egypt ran on the same office; Joseph held it under Pharaoh: "you shall be over my house... only as regards the throne will I be greater than you" (Genesis 41:40), complete with the signet ring that let Joseph act with Pharaoh's authority.

Isaiah 22:15-25 is the only place in Scripture where we watch the office change hands, and it reads like an investiture rite. Shebna, the sitting steward, is deposed for pride (he carved himself a grand tomb). God announces his replacement: "I will call my servant Eliakim... I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your girdle on him, and will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem... And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open" (22:20-22).

Inventory the parallels to Matthew 16:19 with the group: a Davidic kingdom; a single officer under the king; a key as the emblem of the office; opening and shutting that none can reverse, exactly the register of binding and loosing that heaven ratifies. And the New Testament itself certifies half the connection: Revelation 3:7 quotes Isaiah 22:22 of the risen Christ, "who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens," placing Isaiah's key squarely in Jesus' hands; the step from there to Peter's keys in Matthew 16 is an inference, but one the texts together powerfully invite. Christ owns the key eternally; at Caesarea Philippi he does what Davidic kings do with keys: he entrusts them to a steward. The pope is therefore the vicar of Christ, never his successor. Christ is alive; the steward serves a reigning King.

Succession is native to the passage, not imported by Catholics. The scene exists because the office is passing from one man to another: Shebna out, Eliakim in, the robe and key transferred. An office with insignia is precisely the kind of thing that outlives its holders; that is what makes it an office rather than a friendship. If Jesus hands Peter the steward's key, he is creating something meant to be handed on. (The full succession argument is Session Ten; tonight it only needs to be seen in the furniture of the text.)

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Two honest notes to keep the session from overreaching. First, the fatherhood line: the steward "shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (22:21). The title pope simply means papa, father, and it delights groups to find the steward already wearing it; but be accurate, the title's actual history runs through early Christian usage for bishops generally. The point is the office's paternal character, not an etymology. Second, verse 25: the oracle ends with the peg giving way, on the usual reading even Eliakim's. Stewards are judged too; the office never deifies the officeholder. That sober note is a feature, not a bug, and this study will lean on it at Session Nine.

## OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

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**Genesis 41:40-44.** Joseph made vizier of Egypt: over Pharaoh's house, signet ring on his hand, all commands obeyed, greater than all but the throne. The steward pattern is older than Israel, and God's providence had already used it once to save his people through a suffering, exalted servant.

**1 Kings 4:6; 1 Kings 18:3; 2 Kings 18:18.** The office "over the household" as standing furniture of the Hebrew monarchies across centuries: Ahishar under Solomon and Eliakim under Hezekiah in the Davidic line of Judah, and Obadiah under Ahab in the northern kingdom of Israel. One king at a time, and one steward at a time.

**2 Samuel 7:12-16.** The Davidic covenant promises an everlasting house and throne. Gabriel tells Mary her Son receives exactly that throne (Luke 1:32-33). The kingdom Jesus proclaims is the restored kingdom of David, which is why its architecture, steward included, is Davidic architecture.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Jerome** *Commentary on Isaiah, on chapter 22*

Jerome reads the key of the house of David laid on Eliakim's shoulder as a figure fulfilled in Christ, who declares in the Apocalypse that he himself holds the key of David, opening what none can shut. What the steward carried in figure and for a time, Jerome teaches, the King owns in fullness and forever.

#### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** *Homily 4.1, as long handed down under his name*

In this homily Christ addresses Simon directly: I have made you the foundation of the holy Church, and I have given you the keys of my kingdom. Ephrem's Syriac tradition, praying in a tongue next door to Jesus' own Aramaic, heard in Kepha's keys the full weight of a royal appointment: the treasures of the King entrusted to his chosen servant.

#### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** *Catechetical Lectures*

Instructing catechumens in the mid-fourth century, Cyril calls Peter the chief and foremost of the apostles, the bearer of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. For Cyril this is simply the Church's plain memory, taught to beginners without argument: among the Twelve there is an order, and at its head stands the keybearer.

### CATECHISM CONNECTION

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**CCC 553** reads Matthew 16:19 through tonight's lens: the power of the keys designates authority to govern the house of God, and Jesus, the Good Shepherd, confirmed this mandate after his Resurrection.

**CCC 881** states the office plainly: the Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the rock of his Church, gave him the keys, and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock.

**CCC 552** completes last week's verse: Peter's mission is to keep the confessed faith from eclipse and to strengthen his brothers, the steward's service to the household in doctrinal form.

### THREAD WATCH

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**The Job Posting thread resolves tonight.** Open the second sealed blank before the hunt begins: who wrote Isaiah? Celebrate the hits, enjoy the misses (expect Daniel and Ezekiel votes), and make the moment ceremonial. The first blank, the fisherman's new job, stays sealed; three sessions remain before Session Six opens it.

**The Office thread plants tonight.** Succession is visible in the furniture of Isaiah 22: the office passes from Shebna to Eliakim. Name what the group sees, then park it; the full argument arrives at Session Ten with Acts 1:20 and the earliest Fathers. Do not spend Session Ten's ammunition tonight.

**The Failing Steward thread plants quietly.** Verse 25, Eliakim's peg giving way, is tonight's sober footnote. It matures at Session Nine, when Peter himself fails publicly after receiving the keys. If someone raises bad popes tonight, thank them sincerely and promise them Session Nine and Twelve by name.

## SESSION GOALS

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1.

Resolve the second sealed guess and let the group find Isaiah 22:22 with their own hands, unprompted.

2.

Reconstruct the royal steward's office from Scripture: over the household, second to the king, father to the city, keeper of the key.

3.

Certify the Matthew 16 connection from the New Testament itself via Revelation 3:7, and land the vicar-not-successor distinction.

4.

See succession and accountability already present in the office: Shebna out, Eliakim in, and even Eliakim's peg not eternal.

## TIME NOTE

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75 to 90 minutes. The hunt at Build 1 and 2 deserves unhurried time; budget fifteen minutes for it. If time runs short, cut Build 8 and compress the Joseph question (Build 6) to a leader mention. Never rush the discovery itself.

## PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Opening Prayer:

*Father, your Word hides treasures in plain sight and rewards those who search. Tonight, open what no one can shut. Show us the design you wrote centuries before Caesarea Philippi, and teach us to trust the King who plans his house so carefully. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

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1.

Who holds the keys where you work, or where you grew up? Not the owner: the person whose ring of keys meant real, daily authority. What did everyone understand about that person?

## 2.

Have you ever discovered something yourself, in a text, in nature, in math, that someone could have just told you? Why was finding it different?

### BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

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## 1.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Sealed sheets out. Open the second blank only: the prophet with the job posting. Go around and read your guesses aloud before anyone opens a Bible. Then: everyone turn to Isaiah 22:15-22 and read it silently. Raise your hand when you find the verse that connects to last week. Do not shout it out; let everyone get there.

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Verse 22: "And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." A key, in David's kingdom, with opening and shutting that no one can reverse. The room should be buzzing; give the moment its space and honor the correct guesses ceremonially.

Now the group has earned the right to ask the real questions: who are these men, what is this job, and did Jesus mean this? The rest of the night answers them in order.

## 2.

Read 22:15-19 again, out loud this time. Who is Shebna, what is his title, and why is he being fired?

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Shebna is "over the household," *'al ha-bayit* in Hebrew: the royal steward of the house of David under King Hezekiah. His title is the office; his crime is pride, memorialized in stone: he has carved himself a magnificent tomb, "you who have hewn here a tomb for yourself." He treated the office as personal glory.

So God announces his removal in some of the most vivid firing language in Scripture: whirled away like a ball into a wide land. First lesson of the night, and it costs Catholics nothing to say it loudly: the steward serves the house. When he serves himself, God himself intervenes. Remember that; this study will need it later.

## 3.

Read 22:20-22, the investiture of Eliakim. Inventory it: list every single thing Eliakim receives, item by item, and what each one signifies.

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

The robe and the girdle: vestments of office, transferred from his predecessor. "Your authority... committed to his hand": real governing power, delegated. "He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah": the steward's rule is paternal, not managerial. And the key of the

house of David on his shoulder, with the irreversible open-and-shut.

Notice the little delight hiding in the fatherhood line: the office is paternal by design, and the Christian name for Peter's successor, pope, simply means papa. The historical title grew up in early Christian usage, so hold the point lightly, but the resonance is real: the steward of the house was always meant to be a father in it, and verse 23 adds that he will be "a throne of honor to his father's house," a seat, which is what a see is.

#### 4.

Now the question the whole night turns on: line up Isaiah 22 next to Matthew 16:17-19 and count the parallels yourselves. How many can the group find?

##### **ANSWER · share after the discussion**

The setting: the kingdom of David, then and now, since Peter has just confessed Jesus as the Davidic Messiah, "the Christ." The structure: one officer under one king, singled out by name. The emblem: the key, and in Matthew, keys of the kingdom. The power: open and none shall shut, next to bind and loose ratified in heaven, the same register of irreversible official acts. Even the fatherhood note finds its echo in the office's later history.

This is why the scene at Caesarea Philippi would have rung Old Testament bells for Matthew's Jewish readers: a Davidic King, newly confessed, doing the one thing Davidic kings do with keys, appointing his steward over the house. Jesus did not reach for a random metaphor. He filled a standing office.

#### 5.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Does Scripture itself connect Isaiah's key to Jesus? Someone find and read Revelation 3:7, written by John near the end of the first century. What is the risen Jesus holding, and where does the language come from?

##### **ANSWER · share after the discussion**

"The holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens." It is Isaiah 22:22, quoted nearly verbatim, applied to the risen Christ. The New Testament itself certifies that this verse's key belongs to Jesus' kingdom. Revelation does not mention Peter; the link to Matthew 16 is our inference, but it is an inference standing on Scripture's own identification of whose key this is.

Put the two texts together and the geometry appears: Christ holds the key of David eternally (Revelation 3:7), and Christ gives the keys of the kingdom to Peter (Matthew 16:19). He delegates without abdicating, exactly the pattern of the royal steward's office in David's kingdom: the king owns, the steward carries. Which yields the most clarifying sentence of the night: the pope is not Christ's successor, because Christ is not dead. He is Peter's successor, and Christ's steward. The Church's own word is vicar: one who acts in the name of a living, reigning King.

#### 6.

LIVE DISCOVERY. The steward's office is even older than David. Someone find and read Genesis 41:40-44, Joseph before Pharaoh. What does Joseph receive, and what are the limits of it?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

"You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only as regards the throne will I be greater than you." Plus the signet ring, the power to act with Pharaoh's own authority, and all Egypt obeying. A steward with full delegated power and one absolute limit: the throne is not his.

God has used this office before: a beloved son, presumed lost, exalted to the right hand of the king, dispensing bread to a starving world. The typology runs deep, and it sets the permanent boundary of tonight's doctrine. The steward never becomes the king. Every Catholic claim about the papacy lives inside Joseph's sentence: only as regards the throne is the King greater.

**7.**

Now watch what the passage does that nobody told the prophecy to do: how did Eliakim get the office in the first place? What does the mere existence of this scene tell us about the *kind* of thing the office is?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

He got it by succession. The scene exists because the office is changing hands: Shebna out, Eliakim in, the same robe, the same authority, the same key transferred to new shoulders. Offices with insignia are, by nature, the kind of thing that outlives officeholders; that is exactly what distinguishes an office from a friendship or a personal charisma.

So when Jesus reaches for this office to define Peter's role, the succession question is not a Catholic afterthought smuggled in later; it is standing in the furniture of the source text. Whether and how the keys actually passed to successors is a claim we will test properly, from Acts and from the earliest Christian writers, at Session Ten. Tonight, simply notice: Jesus chose the one office in the Old Testament that we watch being handed on.

**DIG DEEPER · The peg that gave way**

The oracle ends darkly: "the peg that was fastened in a sure place will give way" (Isaiah 22:25). On the most common reading, following verse 24, where the whole weight of his father's house hangs on him, even Eliakim's peg gives way, though some interpreters refer the verse back to Shebna. Either way the lesson stands: stewards are mortal and judged. Scripture refuses to let the office deify the officeholder, and so does the Church: the steward carries the King's key with the King watching. Hold this verse in reserve. In a few weeks this study will stare straight at the failures of Peter himself, and at his successors' worst chapters, and tonight's sober footnote will turn out to be load-bearing.

**8.**

Step back and assemble the whole picture. In kingdom terms, using everything found tonight, what exactly did Jesus establish at Caesarea Philippi?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

The confessed Davidic King, standing before the rock of dead gods, announced the rebuilt assembly of God, named its foundation stone, and installed the steward of his house, keys and all, per the standing constitution of David's kingdom. Not a metaphor invented on the spot: an office filled, with a documented job description seven centuries old.

And because the King lives forever and holds the key of David eternally, his steward governs only in his name, a father to the household, second to the throne, judged by the King he serves. That is the Catholic doctrine of the papacy in one Old Testament passage, found tonight by this group with its own hands.

## SEND · TAKING IT WITH US

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### 1.

God wrote Peter's job description seven hundred years early. Where in your own life do you need to trust that God's designs run longer and deeper than what you can currently see?

### 2.

The steward is "a father to the inhabitants" of the house. Who has been a father to you in the household of God, and have you ever told them?

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## LIVE IT THIS WEEK

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### 1.

Read Isaiah 22:15-25 once more this week, then Revelation 3:7-8, and write in your own words, one sentence each: what the King keeps, and what the steward carries.

### 2.

Send a message this week to a spiritual father in your life, a priest, a grandfather, a mentor, thanking him specifically.

### 3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, and this week add: "Lord, make your steward faithful, and your household one."

### Closing Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, Son of David, you hold the key of David: you open and none can shut. Thank you for ordering your house with such care, for stewards and fathers, and for writing your designs centuries ahead of our finding them. Keep your steward faithful, keep your household one, and keep us hunting your Word for treasure. Amen.*

**Scripture Memory Verse:** "And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." (Isaiah 22:22, RSV2CE)

## PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Three, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

### PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Main text, discovered live at Build 1, then read in sections

#### Matthew 16:17-19

Build 4: the parallel inventory

#### Revelation 3:7

Live discovery, Build 5: Scripture certifies the link

#### Genesis 41:40-44

Live discovery, Build 6: Joseph the vizier

#### 1 Kings 4:6; 1 Kings 18:3; 2 Kings 18:18

Leader background: the office across the centuries

#### 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Luke 1:32-33

Leader background: the Davidic kingdom restored

#### Isaiah 22:25

Dig Deeper: even the steward is judged

#### CCC 552; 553; 881

Catechism Connection

## SESSION FOUR

# Binding and Loosing

*Matthew 16:19; 18:15-20; 23:1-3*

## PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Discovery Aim:** Participants discover what binding and loosing meant in first-century Judaism, that Israel's own Torah established a living court whose rulings bound the people, that the Twelve share the binding power while Peter alone holds the keys, and that Jesus himself distinguishes a teaching office from the worthiness of the men who hold it.

**Catholic Touchstone:** The Magisterium. Bishops in communion with Peter's successor teach with Christ's authority, a service to the Word of God, not a lordship over it (CCC 85-87; 880-882): the steward and the officers of the one household.

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Binding and loosing was not a mysterious phrase to Jesus' hearers. In the Jewish idiom, well attested in later rabbinic literature and already reflected in first-century usage, to bind was to declare something forbidden and to loose was to declare it permitted: authoritative rulings on conduct and doctrine. The terms also covered discipline, imposing or lifting exclusion from the community. When Jesus hands over binding and loosing, he is conferring recognizable juridical and teaching authority, the kind Israel's teachers claimed, now given to his own appointed officers with heaven's ratification.

The grammar of the two texts is the architecture of the Church. Matthew 16:19 is second person singular: to you, Peter, the keys; whatever you bind. Matthew 18:18 extends binding and loosing to the disciples corporately: whatever you (plural) bind. The household of Session Three has both a steward and officers. The Catholic shape, one pope and the college of bishops with him, is not a medieval accretion; it is the grammar of Matthew (CCC 880-882). Note carefully what is never repeated: the keys. Those are given once, to one man.

Matthew 18:15-18 sets binding and loosing in the context of sin and reconciliation: a brother confronted, witnesses brought, and finally "tell it to the church," with exclusion as the last resort and restoration always the goal. The Church's power is disciplinary and medicinal, exercised at the door of the community: excommunication and absolution are the same key turning two directions. John 20:21-23, where the risen Lord breathes the Spirit and confers forgiving and retaining, is the same authority in its sacramental register.

Deuteronomy 17:8-13 is the sleeper text of the night, and most Catholics have never seen it. The Torah itself commands that hard cases go up to the priests and the judge at the chosen place, and their verdict binds: "you shall be careful to do according to all that they direct you... you shall not turn aside from the verdict that they declare to you, either to the right hand or to the left," on pain of death for presumptuous refusal. Israel was never a religion of text alone; the Torah that Protestants and Catholics both revere itself establishes a living, binding interpretive authority. Let the group discover this cold; it reframes the entire sola scriptura conversation without a single polemical word.

Matthew 23:1-3 supplies the distinction that guards the doctrine from its favorite objection. Jesus tells the crowds that the scribes and Pharisees "sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice." In one sentence the Lord separates the office from the officeholder: the seat's authority survives the sitter's hypocrisy. Whoever asks tonight about bad popes (someone will) has stumbled onto Jesus' own category, and deserves to hear that Sessions Nine and Twelve take the question head-on.

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A small honesty note on 16:19 and 18:18: the Greek future perfect ("shall be bound" or "shall have been bound in heaven") is genuinely debated, whether heaven ratifies the Church's act or the Church declares heaven's prior decision. The Church's doctrine does not hang on the parsing: either way, Christ has promised that heaven stands behind the Church's exercise of the binding and loosing he conferred, a promise the Church herself understands with precision: it guarantees her definitive teaching on faith and morals and her sacramental absolution, not every prudential, disciplinary, or administrative act of the men who hold office. Those remain human acts, reformable and sometimes wrong. Say so plainly if it comes up, and move on.

## OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

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**Deuteronomy 17:8-13.** The Torah's own supreme court: hard cases decided by the priests and the judge, verdicts binding under the gravest penalty. God's covenant people were constituted with a living interpretive authority from the start. Tonight's central live discovery.

**Numbers 11:16-17, 24-25.** God takes some of the spirit that is on Moses and puts it on seventy elders, who share the burden of governing, while Moses remains uniquely Moses. Collegial authority with a personal head is Israel's ancient shape, not the Church's innovation.

**Isaiah 22:22.** Last week's key: "he shall open, and none shall shut." Opening and shutting, binding and loosing: the steward's irreversible official acts, now distributed through the household.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. John Chrysostom** *On the Priesthood, Book 3*

Chrysostom stands in awe of the authority Christ lodged in his ministers: God has given to men, he says, an authority he gave neither to angels nor archangels, for what priests do below, God ratifies above, the Master confirming the sentence of his servants. Chrysostom's point is not clerical pride

but trembling: such power exists only as stewardship, and its holders will answer for it.

#### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Augustine** *Sermon 295, on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul*

Augustine preaches that what was given to Peter was given for the whole Church: Peter, bearing the figure of the Church's unity, received the keys so that when the Church binds and looses, Christ's promise is at work in her. For Augustine the singular gift and the whole body are not rivals; the one man holds the keys precisely so that the many may be one.

#### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Cyprian of Carthage** *Letter 33*

Cyprian grounds the Church's whole ordered structure in the words spoken to Peter: the Lord, establishing the honor of the bishop and the order of his Church, built her upon Peter, and from that founding the ministry of oversight and the authority to govern descend through time. For Cyprian, to attack the order is to attack the founding sentence itself.

### CATECHISM CONNECTION

**CCC 85-87** defines the Magisterium and immediately bounds it: the task of authentic interpretation is entrusted to the living teaching office, which is not superior to the Word of God but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on.

**CCC 880-882** gives the two-text architecture in doctrinal form: the college of the Twelve with Peter at its head, and its continuation in the bishops with the pope, who has full, supreme, and universal power as pastor of the whole Church.

**CCC 1444-1445** connects binding and loosing to reconciliation: the office of binding and loosing given to Peter and the college includes the authority to absolve sins, to readmit, and to exclude, the words of Matthew 16 and 18 living today in the confessional.

### THREAD WATCH

**The Office thread develops.** Tonight adds the officers to the steward: singular keys, plural binding. The succession question sharpened last week stays parked until Session Ten; if the group reaches for it, praise the instinct and hold the line.

**The Failing Steward thread gets its second planting.** Moses' seat (Matthew 23:2-3) is Jesus' own office-versus-officeholder distinction. Name it clearly tonight and promise Sessions Nine and Twelve for the full reckoning with Peter's failures and the papacy's worst men.

**Both sealed blanks stay closed.** The fisherman's new job opens at Session Six, two weeks out. Groups get twitchy at this stage; the discipline is part of the fun.

## SESSION GOALS

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1.

Define binding and loosing from its first-century Jewish context: forbidding and permitting, excluding and readmitting.

2.

Discover Deuteronomy 17:8-13 cold and let the group articulate its implication: the Torah itself establishes living, binding interpretive authority.

3.

Map the singular-plural grammar of Matthew 16 and 18 onto the household: one steward with keys, many officers who bind and loose.

4.

Receive from Jesus himself, at Moses' seat, the distinction between the office and the worthiness of its holder.

## TIME NOTE

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75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, compress Build 7 (Numbers 11) into a leader statement and trim the Dig Deeper. Protect Build 2, the Deuteronomy discovery, and Build 6, the steelman; they carry the night.

## PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Opening Prayer:

*Father, you did not leave your people to guess their way through hard questions. You gave Israel judges, you gave the Church shepherds, and you promised that heaven stands behind the office your Son established. Give us tonight the humility to be taught, and the clarity to see your design. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

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1.

Think of a group you have been part of with no referee, no moderator, no final decision-maker. What happened when a real disagreement hit?

2.

When you have a genuinely hard moral question, where do you actually take it? A friend, a search bar, a priest, your gut? How is that working?

## BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

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### 1.

Last week ended with keys; this week asks what the keyholder actually does. Read Matthew 16:19 again. "Bind" and "loose" were technical terms Jesus' hearers already knew. Before I tell you: from the sound of them, what would you guess they mean? Then the leader supplies the first-century sense.

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

In the Jewish idiom of the period, reflected richly in later rabbinic literature, to bind is to declare something forbidden, and to loose is to declare it permitted: authoritative rulings on doctrine and conduct. The same pair covered discipline: to bind someone under exclusion, or loose them back into the community.

So the steward's job is not ceremonial. He rules on what the household holds and how it lives, and verse 19's stunner is the ratification clause: what the officer binds on earth, heaven backs. Jesus is creating an authority whose binding rulings, within the competence he gave it, God himself stands behind.

### 2.

LIVE DISCOVERY. You read Deuteronomy 17:8-13 cold this week. Someone read it aloud now, and everyone else listen for the answer to one question: according to the Torah itself, what was Israel supposed to do when a case was too hard to settle locally?

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Go up. Bring the case to the priests and the judge at the place God chooses, and their verdict binds: "you shall be careful to do according to all that they direct you... you shall not turn aside from the verdict that they declare to you, either to the right hand or to the left." Presumptuous refusal carried the death penalty. This is a supreme court, established inside the Torah.

Sit with what that means: the Scriptures themselves establish a living authority to interpret the Scriptures. Israel was never a book-alone religion, by the book's own command. God's pattern for his covenant people has always been text plus living judges, and tonight's texts show Jesus renewing exactly that pattern for the rebuilt assembly.

### 3.

Now the grammar hunt. Put Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18 side by side and read both aloud. Who is addressed in each? What is given in both, and what is given only once?

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#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Matthew 16 is singular: I will give *you* the keys; whatever *you* bind. One man, just renamed, just made

rock. Matthew 18 is plural: truly I say to *you* (all), whatever *you* (all) bind: the disciples corporately receive binding and loosing.

Both texts, one household: a steward and officers, exactly the Davidic architecture from last week. And note the asymmetry with care, because it is the whole Catholic structure in miniature: binding and loosing is shared; the keys are never repeated, never pluralized, never given again. The Catechism draws precisely this map: the college of the apostles with Peter at its head, continued in the bishops with the pope (CCC 880-882).

#### 4.

Back up and read Matthew 18:15-18 as one unit. What situation is binding and loosing embedded in here, and what does that tell us the power is *for*?

##### **ANSWER · share after the discussion**

A brother sins; you go to him alone; then with witnesses; then "tell it to the church," and only then, if he refuses even the church, exclusion. The process is patient, escalating, and aimed at winning the brother back at every step. Binding and loosing here is the community's door: the authority to exclude and to readmit.

The power is medicinal, not punitive for its own sake, and the risen Lord gives it a sacramental register on Easter night: "if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23). The same key turns both directions, and the Church still calls the confessional the tribunal of mercy (CCC 1444-1445).

#### 5.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Now for the objection that guards the whole doctrine. Someone find and read Matthew 23:1-3, and listen for something almost shocking: what does Jesus tell the crowds to do about the scribes and Pharisees, and what distinction is he forcing us to make?

##### **ANSWER · share after the discussion**

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice." Jesus acknowledges a real teaching office in Israel, Moses' seat, and commands respect for its rulings, in the same breath that he condemns the men sitting in it as hypocrites, and then spends the rest of the chapter saying exactly how.

So the distinction between an office and the worthiness of its holder is not a Catholic escape hatch invented to survive the Borgias; it is Jesus' own category, stated in his own voice. The seat's authority can survive the sitter's sins because the authority was never sourced in the sitter's virtue. Hold this verse; when this study reaches Peter's own failures and the papacy's darkest holders, this is the ground we will stand on.

#### 6.

Steelman chain. A thoughtful friend says: "This is exactly what worries me. Give men the power to bind consciences with heaven's backing, and you get inquisitions and abuse. Scripture alone is the only safe authority, because Scripture cannot sin." Give that its full strength first. What is it right about?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

It is right about the wounds: office holders have abused sacred authority, and the victims were real. It is right that conscience is sacred and that no man may simply replace it. And it is right to love Scripture as the standard that judges every teacher; the Catholic Church herself teaches that the Magisterium "is not superior to the Word of God but serves it," teaching only what has been handed on (CCC 86). Concede every word of that with a whole heart. Strengthen the objection further before answering it: the classic Protestant position is not authority-free individualism. Historic sola scriptura affirms real church authority in pastors, councils, creeds, and confessions, but insists that Scripture is the only infallible rule and that every human authority remains fallible and reformable.

Then press gently with tonight's own discoveries. Scripture cannot sin, but Scripture also cannot speak when two sincere readers disagree about what it means. So the real question is not Scripture versus a living authority; serious Christians on both sides affirm both. The question is what kind of living authority Christ established. Deuteronomy 17 attached heaven's own sanction to the court's verdicts; Matthew 16 and 18 promise that what the officers bind on earth is bound in heaven, and Jesus endorsed Moses' seat even under hypocrites (Matthew 23). If every ruling remains provisional and appealable by each reader, that promise means little, and the fragmentation of communions holding the same Bible shows what a merely fallible referee can and cannot settle. The question is not whether such an office is dangerous in human hands; it is whether Christ, knowing that, established it anyway, and promised to stand behind it.

**7.**

LIVE DISCOVERY. One more Old Testament pattern. Someone find and read Numbers 11:16-17, 24-25. What does God do with the spirit that is on Moses, and what does Moses remain?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

God takes some of the spirit resting on Moses and puts it on seventy elders, who prophesy and share the burden of governing the people. Authority is genuinely distributed; Moses is genuinely relieved. And yet Moses remains uniquely Moses: the seventy extend his government, they do not replace or outvote it.

Collegiality with a personal head is Israel's ancient shape: Moses and the seventy, the king and his steward and officers, and now the rock with the Twelve. When Catholics describe the pope and the bishops, they are not describing a corporate org chart bolted onto the Gospel; they are describing the oldest governing pattern God's people have.

**DIG DEEPER · Bound in heaven: who moves first?**

The Greek of "shall be bound in heaven" (*estai dedemenon*) is formally a periphrastic future perfect. Scholars genuinely debate its force: does it function like a simple future (heaven will ratify the Church's act), or does it carry true future-perfect force (the Church declares what heaven has already bound)? The doctrine survives either reading: on both, Christ promises that the official acts of the office he created carry heaven's backing, and on both, the office is a servant declaring God's will rather than a

rival inventing it. It is a fine case study in Catholic confidence: the Church's claim never depended on winning every grammatical coin flip.

**8.**

Assemble the night. Using Deuteronomy's court, Matthew's grammar, and Moses' seat, describe in your own words the authority structure Jesus built, and what it is for.

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

One household of God, rebuilt by the Davidic King: a steward with the keys, officers who bind and loose with him, verdicts that heaven stands behind, all in continuity with the pattern God gave Israel from the beginning, judges for hard cases, seventy for the burden, a seat whose authority outlives its sitters.

And its purpose, on every page tonight, is service: hard cases answered so consciences can rest, sinners excluded only to be won back, the deposit guarded so that the household's children inherit it whole. The authority is real because the promises are real; it is safe, in the end, not because its holders are sinless, but because the King who ratifies from heaven never stops being the one in charge.

**SEND · TAKING IT WITH US**

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**1.**

Where in your life right now are you refusing to bring a hard case "up": carrying a moral question alone that the Church has actually answered, or that a confessor could actually settle?

**2.**

Jesus commanded respect for Moses' seat while its sitters were hypocrites. Is there an authority in your life, in the Church or out of it, that you have dismissed because of its holders rather than engaging its office?

**LIVE IT THIS WEEK**

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**1.**

Take one hard question you have been carrying and actually look up what the Church teaches, in the Catechism, not a comment section. Bring what you find, and how it landed, next week.

**2.**

Go to confession this week and notice the binding and loosing happening in real time: the tribunal of mercy is Matthew 16 and 18 still operating.

**3.**

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Lord, give your Church shepherds who practice what they preach."

### Closing Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, you promised that what your Church binds on earth, heaven stands behind. Thank you for not leaving us alone with our hardest questions. Thank you for judges, elders, shepherds, and a steward. Make the men who hold your offices holy, and make us humble enough to be taught. Amen.*

**Scripture Memory Verse:** "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:19, RSV2CE)

## PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Four, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

### PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Main text, Builds 1, 3: keys and singular binding

#### Matthew 18:15-20

Main text, Builds 3-4: corporate binding, the community's door

#### Deuteronomy 17:8-13

Live discovery, Build 2: the Torah's binding court

#### Matthew 23:1-3

Live discovery, Build 5: Moses' seat, office versus officeholder

#### John 20:21-23

Build 4: forgiving and retaining, the sacramental register

#### Numbers 11:16-17, 24-25

Live discovery, Build 7: Moses and the seventy

#### Isaiah 22:22

Callback: the steward's irreversible acts

#### CCC 85-87; 880-882; 1444-1445



## SESSION FIVE

# Strengthen Your Brethren

Luke 22:24-34

## PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Discovery Aim:** Participants discover that at the Last Supper itself, with a dispute about greatness still hanging in the air, Jesus prays for one disciple by name against Satan's demand to sift them all, and commissions that one, in full foreknowledge of his coming failure, to turn again and strengthen his brothers.

**Catholic Touchstone:** The Petrine ministry of confirming the brethren. Vatican I and the Catechism both read Luke 22:32 as the charter of Peter's task: to keep the faith of his brothers from failing, a strength that is Christ's prayer at work, not the man's own virtue (CCC 552; 641-642).

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The scene's timing is the first shock. Luke places the dispute about greatness at the Last Supper itself: the Eucharist has just been instituted, the betrayal announced, and "a dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest" (22:24). Jesus answers not by abolishing greatness but by converting it: "let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves" (22:26). Notice that he assumes there is a greatest and a leader among them; what he overturns is the pagan style of it, lording and titles, not the existence of order. "I am among you as one who serves" (22:27) is the job description for every office this study has found.

Then the pronouns, which your group was primed to count. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat" (22:31): the you is plural, *hymas*, all of them. Satan's demand, echoing Job, targets the whole apostolic band. "But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (22:32): the you is singular, *sou*. Against an assault on all, Jesus prays for one. The defense of the many runs through the faith of the one, which is simply the rock and steward architecture of Sessions Two and Three, now deployed in spiritual warfare.

The commission completes it: "and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." Three staggering admissions live in that clause. Jesus knows Peter will fall ("when you have turned again" presumes a fall to turn from); the fall does not revoke the office; and the office's purpose is defined as strengthening the brothers, *stērisōn*, to make firm, to establish. Peter's job, given at the table of the first Eucharist, is to be the one whose Christ-prayed-for faith steadies everyone else's.

Immediately Peter overpromises: "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death" (22:33), and Jesus answers with the rooster. Hold the sequence honestly: the prayer, the commission, the bravado, the prediction of denial, all within four verses. Scripture itself refuses to let the Petrine ministry rest on Peter's self-confidence. It rests on the prayer of Christ, which is exactly why it can survive Peter. This is the deep grammar of the whole Catholic claim, and Session Nine will spend a full evening on it.

Note what Jesus does not pray: that Peter be spared the sifting, or that Peter never sin. He prays that Peter's *faith* not fail, *ekleipō*, give out, die away. Peter's courage will fail within hours; his faith, wounded and weeping, will not. The distinction between impeccability (never sinning), which no pope has ever had, and the protected confession of the faith, which Christ himself prays into the office, begins in this verse.

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Vatican I quotes this passage directly in defining the Petrine ministry, and the Catechism follows (CCC 552): Peter's mission is to keep the faith of his brothers from failing and to strengthen them in it. When Catholics say the pope confirms the brethren, they are not reaching for a proof text after the fact; they are quoting the Last Supper.

## OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

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**Job 1:6-12.** Satan demanding leave to sift a servant of God is Job's story retold: the accuser asks, and God permits a testing within limits. Luke 22:31 uses the same courtroom picture, with one difference that changes everything: this time, the Advocate prays for the accused by name before the test begins.

**Amos 9:9.** "I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve." Sifting is prophetic imagery for a violent testing that separates. The apostles are about to be shaken; the question is what remains in the sieve.

**Isaiah 22:23-24.** The steward is fastened "like a peg in a sure place," and on him hangs "the whole weight of his father's house." The image of one man bearing the household's weight so the household holds together is the steward's job description, and Luke 22:32 is its New Covenant form: the brothers' faith hangs on the one prayed for.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Leo the Great** *Sermon 3, On His Birthday as Pope*

Leo preaches that the danger of the trial was common to all the apostles, yet the Lord took special care of Peter, praying for Peter's faith in particular, as though the others would stand more surely if the mind of their chief were not overcome. In Peter, Leo says, the courage of all is fortified: Christ so arranged the gift that what he granted to one, he granted through that one to the whole body.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Ambrose** *Commentary on Psalm 40*

Ambrose coins the maxim the Church never stopped repeating: where Peter is, there is the Church. For Ambrose this is not flattery of a man but confidence in a design: Christ attached the unity and steadiness of his flock to the one he prayed for, so that finding Peter is finding the place where the brethren are strengthened.

#### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Bede the Venerable** *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*

Bede observes that the Lord, who foreknew the denial, did not cancel the commission but built it around the fall: Peter is told to strengthen his brothers precisely as one who has turned again. The shepherd of the weak, Bede teaches, was permitted to know weakness in himself first, so that his strengthening of others would be mercy speaking, not superiority.

### CATECHISM CONNECTION

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**CCC 552** reads tonight's verse as Peter's charter: because of his faith, prayed for by Christ, Peter's mission is to keep the faith of his brothers from failing and to strengthen them in it.

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**CCC 641-642** notes that after the Resurrection, Peter is the first apostolic witness to whom the risen Lord appears (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5), the one whose confirmed faith then confirms the others, the commission of Luke 22 already in motion on Easter day.

**CCC 2600** points out how often Luke shows Jesus praying before the decisive moments of his ministry and of Peter's: the whole Petrine office is suspended from a thread, and the thread is the prayer of Christ, which cannot fail.

### THREAD WATCH

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**The Failing Steward thread tightens.** Tonight Jesus himself predicts the failure and pre-loads the recovery: "when you have turned again." Do not resolve the tension; Session Nine owns it. If the group wants to talk denials tonight, note the rooster and promise the full reckoning.

**The Fisherman-to-Shepherd thread: one week out.** "Strengthen your brethren" is a shepherding verb wearing a disguise, and next session the disguise comes off with the first sealed blank. Say absolutely nothing about animals.

**The Revealed Confession thread advances.** Session Two planted "flesh and blood has not revealed this"; tonight adds "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." The two verses are the twin pillars of Session Twelve. Underline tonight's and keep walking.

### SESSION GOALS

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1.

See the setting: the dispute about greatness at the Eucharistic table, and greatness converted to service rather than abolished.

2.

Discover the plural-singular pronoun shift of 22:31-32 and articulate its architecture: the many defended through the one.

3.

Distinguish what Jesus prays for (faith that does not fail) from what he does not (a Peter who never falls), and mark the distinction for Sessions Nine and Twelve.

4.

Hold the full sequence honestly: prayer, commission, bravado, rooster, all four verses together.

## TIME NOTE

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75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, compress Build 1 and cut Build 8. Protect Build 3, the pronoun discovery, and Build 6, the faith-versus-courage distinction; they are the night's cargo.

## PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Opening Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, on the night you were betrayed, you looked at weakness and prayed for it by name. Pray for us tonight. When we are sifted, hold our faith together, and when we have turned again, make us strength for our brothers. You are among us as one who serves; teach us that greatness and no other. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

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1.

Have you ever been publicly confident about something and then failed at it fast? How long did it take you to live it down, with others or with yourself?

2.

Who is the person whose steadiness steadies you, the one whose faith keeps yours standing in bad weather? What do they actually do?

## BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

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1.

Read Luke 22:24-27 and wince with me: where and when is this argument about greatness happening? And watch Jesus' answer closely: does he say there is no greatest, or something stranger?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

It erupts at the Last Supper: the Eucharist just instituted, the betrayal just announced, and the Twelve are ranking themselves. Luke's honesty about the apostles is brutal and wonderful; these are the men Christ builds with.

And Jesus' answer is stranger than abolition: "let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves." He speaks as if there is a greatest and a leader among them, and converts the office rather than canceling it. What he forbids is the Gentile style, lording it and collecting titles. The measure of rank in his kingdom is the towel: "I am among you as one who serves." Every office this study has found lives under that sentence.

2.

Read 22:28-30. Before the warning comes a bestowal: what does Jesus assign to the Twelve, and what does it tell us about the shape of his kingdom?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

"As my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." He confers, *diatithemai*, covenant language, a kingdom with a table and thrones: real, structured authority in the restored Israel.

So the correction of verse 26 was not egalitarian mush. Minutes after rebuking their status-grabbing, Jesus hands them thrones. The kingdom has order; the order has a style, service; and the Twelve govern as judges of the new Israel. Now watch what he does with one of them.

3.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Read 22:31-32 with your homework in hand: you counted the pronouns. Who does Satan demand? Who does Jesus pray for? Say the grammar out loud and then say what it means.

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have *you*," and the you is plural, *hymas*: all of them, the whole apostolic band, demanded for the sieve like Job before the accuser. "But I have prayed for *you* that your faith may not fail," and the you is singular, *sou*: one man, named twice.

Against an assault on all, Jesus concentrates his prayer on one, and gives the reason in the next clause: so that the one, turned again, can strengthen the rest. The defense of the many is routed through the faith of the one. That is not a Catholic gloss; it is the sentence's own architecture, and it is the rock of Session Two and the steward of Session Three now deployed in spiritual warfare.

4.

Stay in verse 32. List what Jesus does *not* pray for, and let it get uncomfortable. Then: what exactly does "when you have turned again" quietly admit?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

He does not pray that Peter be spared the sifting. He does not pray that Peter not sin, not stumble, not deny. He prays one thing: "that your faith may not fail," *ekleipō*, give out, go dark. The prayer is terrifyingly narrow and therefore unbreakable.

And "when you have turned again" admits the fall in advance: there is no turning again without a turning away. Jesus commissions Peter with the denial already in view, builds the office around the wound before the wound exists. Whatever the Petrine ministry rests on, we now know what it is not: Peter's reliability. It rests on a prayer, and the one praying does not fail.

**5.**

Now read 22:33-34 and hold all four verses together as one unit: prayer, commission, bravado, rooster. What does Peter's "I am ready to go with you to prison and to death" reveal about where his confidence is placed, and what does the sequence teach?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Peter answers a promise of Christ's prayer with a promise of his own performance: I am ready. He relocates the ground of his standing from Christ's intercession to his own courage, and Jesus answers the relocation with a timestamp: before the cock crows today, three denials.

The sequence is the lesson: self-confidence is the one foundation the office is never allowed to have. Luke has given us, in four verses, the entire Catholic grammar of the papacy: an office established in full foreknowledge of its holder's sin, guaranteed by Christ's prayer and nothing else, aimed entirely at the brothers' strength. Everything Session Nine will say about failure, and Session Twelve about protection, is already sitting in this paragraph.

**6.**

Sharpen the crucial distinction: within hours Peter's courage fails completely, three denials by a fire. Did his *faith* fail? What is the difference, and how do we know from the story's end?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

His nerve collapsed; his faith, wounded, did not die. The first sign is the weeping (22:62), the grief of a believer who still loves the one he betrayed; the proof is the story's end: Peter turns again, is sought out by the risen Lord (Luke 24:34), and is restored at the shore (John 21). Despair walks away for good; wounded faith comes back. Judas's sifting ends in a field (Matthew 27:3-10; Acts 1:18-19); Peter's ends at a breakfast (John 21:9-19). The difference between the two men is not the size of the sin; it is whether faith survived the sifting.

Name the distinction precisely, because centuries of confusion live here: the Church has never claimed popes cannot sin (impeccability); the claim, whose roots are in this verse, concerns the protected confession of the faith. Christ prayed for Peter's faith, not his flawlessness. What that protection came to mean, and what it never meant, is Session Twelve's whole evening. Tonight we only need the seed: the

prayer targets the faith.

7.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Someone find and read Job 1:6-12, then look back at Luke 22:31. What is the same, and what one thing is gloriously different?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

The same: the accuser appears before God demanding to test a servant, and permission is granted within limits. Satan "demanded to have you": the courtroom of Job convenes again, this time over the whole apostolic college on the worst night of history.

The difference: Job never knew about the courtroom; God attested his integrity there (1:8), but Job himself was told nothing and endured the sifting uninformed. Simon is told in advance, by name, by the Advocate himself: I have prayed for you. The New Covenant's answer to the accuser is not information; it is intercession, and Hebrews says it never stops: "he always lives to make intercession" (Hebrews 7:25). The office is safe for exactly one reason: the Advocate does not lose cases.

**DIG DEEPER · First to the risen Lord**

Easter morning has a detail that is easy to miss: "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" (Luke 24:34), and Paul preserves the same order, "he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:5). Before the group on the road, before the eleven in the room, the risen Christ sought out the man who had denied him, alone, first. No Gospel narrates that meeting; the Church only knows it happened. The commission of Luke 22:32 was already running: the strengthener of the brethren had to be raised up first (CCC 641-642).

8.

Land it on us. "When you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" makes restored failures into the strengtheners of others. Where has that pattern been true in your own life, someone whose fall and turning became your strength, and where might your own turnings be meant for someone else?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Let the group carry this one; the pattern is everywhere once seen: the sponsor who drank, the mentor who lost a marriage and rebuilt, the confessor who understands because he has knelt on the other side of the screen. Strength that has never known the sieve comforts thinly; the brethren are strengthened most by the turned-again.

The landing: this is not merely Peter's biography, it is the Church's method. Christ staffs his household with restored deniers on purpose, so that every act of strengthening carries mercy's accent. Whatever your worst chapter is, verse 32 refuses to let it be wasted.

**SEND · TAKING IT WITH US**

1.

Jesus prayed for Simon by name before the worst night of his life. Whose name do you need to pray over this week, in advance of a sifting you can see coming for them?

2.

"I am ready" was the wrong answer; Peter had to be broken and restored before he could answer "you know that I love you" instead (John 21:15-17). Where are you still answering God with your resume instead of your need?

## LIVE IT THIS WEEK

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1.

Each morning this week, pray Luke 22:32 with your own name in it: "Lord, you have prayed for me, that my faith may not fail." Let the day start from his prayer, not your readiness.

2.

Identify one brother or sister currently being sifted, and do one concrete strengthening act: a call, a meal, an hour, a Mass offered. Turned-again people are for this.

3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Lord, you prayed that Peter's faith not fail; keep the faith of his successor firm, and through him strengthen your brethren."

### Closing Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, Advocate who never loses, you saw the sieve coming and you prayed. Hold our faith together when our courage goes. Meet us on the far side of our failures as you met Simon, and make every one of our turnings into strength for somebody else. Amen.*

**Scripture Memory Verse:** "But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." (Luke 22:32, RSV2CE)

## PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Five, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

### PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Main text, read in units through the Build

Job 1:6-12

Live discovery, Build 7: the accuser's courtroom

**Amos 9:9**

Leader background: sifting as prophetic testing

**Isaiah 22:23-24**

Leader background: the household's weight on the peg

**Luke 22:62**

Build 6: the weeping that proves faith survived

**Hebrews 7:25**

Build 7: he always lives to make intercession

**Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5**

Dig Deeper: risen Lord appears to Simon first

**CCC 552; 641-642; 2600**

Catechism Connection

## SESSIONSIX

# Feed My Sheep

*John 21:1-19*

## PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Discovery Aim:** Participants discover the fisherman's new job: beside a charcoal fire that answers the fire of his denials, Peter is asked three times for love and commissioned three times to feed and tend Christ's own flock. The study's title, and the first sealed guess, open tonight: the catcher of fish becomes the shepherd of sheep.

**Catholic Touchstone:** Peter the shepherd of the whole flock. Christ the Good Shepherd does not resign; he installs a vicar-shepherd over sheep that remain forever his own: "feed *my* lambs, tend *my* sheep" (CCC 553; 881).

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Tonight the title of this study finally explains itself, and the first sealed blank opens. Choreograph the reveal: the group reads the fishing scene cold, walks into 21:15-17 live, and only after "feed my sheep" lands do the sheets come out. The fisherman hired to catch men in Session One receives a different animal and a different verb, and participants who guessed "shepherd" months of story ago get their ceremony.

The setting is a deliberate return to the beginning: Peter announces "I am going fishing" (21:3), and seven disciples fish all night on the Sea of Tiberias and catch nothing, a deliberate echo of the Luke 5 call scene. A stranger on the shore, a command to cast again, an unmanageable catch, and recognition: "It is the Lord!" Jesus restarts Peter's story at its first frame, as if to say: we begin again, from the boats.

The charcoal fire is the Gospel's quiet masterstroke, and it is your live discovery: the Greek word *anthrakia*, charcoal fire, appears exactly twice in the entire New Testament. John 18:18, the fire in the high priest's courtyard where Peter stood warming himself and denied his Lord three times; and John 21:9, the fire on the beach where the risen Jesus cooks breakfast. Jesus rebuilt the scene of the crime: same smell, same light, same warmth on the face, and then asked three questions to answer three denials. The senses remember what the mind buries; Peter's healing had to happen beside charcoal.

The threefold question: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Note the name: not Peter but Simon, son of John, the pre-commission name, as if the Lord goes underneath the office to the man. Peter is "grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?'" (21:17): the third question presses exactly on

the third denial. And each answer receives not absolution language but a job: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Restoration, in Christ's grammar, is recommissioning.

A famous wrinkle to handle honestly: in Greek, Jesus' first two questions use *agapaō* and Peter answers with *phileō*; the third time Jesus switches to Peter's own word. Preachers have built beautiful sermons on the shift (divine love asked, friendship love offered, the Lord stooping to Peter's level). Be honest with the group: John elsewhere uses the two verbs interchangeably, and many careful scholars read the variation as John's normal style rather than a theological ladder. The text's certain freight is elsewhere: three questions for three denials, and the flock handed over. Offer the word study as a possible grace note, not a load-bearing wall.

The possessive pronoun is the doctrine: feed *my* lambs, tend *my* sheep. The flock never becomes Peter's property. Christ, who called himself the Good Shepherd who lays down his life (John 10:11), does not resign the flock; he appoints a shepherd to tend what remains his. Peter understood this to the end of his life: "Tend the flock of God... and when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown" (1 Peter 5:2-4). The under-shepherd language Catholics use for the pope is Peter's own self-description.

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Ezekiel 34 stands behind the whole scene and is the night's second live discovery: God's furious indictment of Israel's failed shepherds, his promise "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep" (34:15), and then, without contradiction, "I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them" (34:23). God shepherding personally and God appointing one shepherd are the same promise in Ezekiel's mouth. Ezekiel's Davidic shepherd is fulfilled first in Christ himself (John 10:11, 16). But the pattern of the prophecy, God shepherding personally and God appointing one shepherd as a single promise, is exactly the shape of John 21: the risen divine Shepherd sets a vicar-shepherd over his flock.

The scene ends where discipleship ends: "you will stretch out your hands... (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.) And after this he said to him, 'Follow me'" (21:18-19). The shepherd's job description includes the shepherd's death; the ancient and well-attested memory of the Church is that Peter followed to a cross in Rome, a thread Session Eleven will pull.

## OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

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**Ezekiel 34:1-16, 23.** The failed shepherds of Israel indicted, God's promise to shepherd his flock himself, and the appointment of "one shepherd, my servant David." Divine shepherding and a single appointed shepherd are one promise, not rivals: the blueprint of John 21.

**2 Samuel 5:2.** Israel's kings were shepherds by title: "You shall be shepherd of my people Israel." To be made shepherd of the flock in David's restored kingdom is royal-steward language in pastoral dress; Sessions Three and Six describe one office in two images.

**Numbers 27:15-20.** Moses, facing death, asks God to appoint a man over the congregation "who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep which have no shepherd," and Joshua is invested before the priest and the people. God's answer to shepherdless sheep is a visible, appointed, commissioned man, invested publicly before priest and people.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Augustine** *Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 123*

Augustine hears in the threefold question the medicine for the threefold denial: a triple confession of love answers the triple fear, and the tongue serves love as fully as it had served dread. And he presses the pronoun: feed my sheep, as mine, not yours; seek in them the Lord's glory and not your own, for those who feed Christ's sheep as if the sheep were their own love themselves and not Christ.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. John Chrysostom** *Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homily 88*

Chrysostom reads the scene as the public restoration and elevation of Peter: the denial is wiped away, and Christ places into his hands the presidency over the brethren, entrusting to the one who loves him the care of the flock he purchased with his blood. If you love me, Chrysostom hears the Lord say, then shepherd what I love.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Gregory the Great** *Pastoral Rule, Book I*

Gregory, himself a successor of Peter, calls the government of souls the art of arts, and insists no one takes it up worthily except through love: the shepherd feeds Christ's sheep by holy living, faithful teaching, and a compassion learned in his own weakness. The commission of John 21, for Gregory, is a lifelong examination of the shepherd's love, never a trophy.

## CATECHISM CONNECTION

**CCC 553** joins tonight's text to the keys: the power to bind and loose, given with the keys, was confirmed after the Resurrection when the risen Jesus, the Good Shepherd, made Peter shepherd of the whole flock: feed my lambs, feed my sheep.

**CCC 881** states the office in one sentence: the Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the rock of his Church, gave him the keys, and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock.

**CCC 1551** guards the pronoun: all authority in the Church is a service, exercised in Christ's name, over a flock that belongs to Christ; ministers are servants of Christ precisely in shepherding what is his.

## THREAD WATCH

**The Fisherman-to-Shepherd thread resolves tonight: open the first sealed blank.** Do it after Build 4, once "feed my sheep" has landed from the text itself. Honor the correct guesses loudly; the guess was planted five sessions ago, and the payoff is the study's title. Both blanks are now open; collect a moment of appreciation for the game and retire the sheets with ceremony.

**The Failing Steward thread takes its decisive turn.** The charcoal fire shows what Christ does with the failure Luke 22 predicted: he restores and recommissions. Session Nine still owns the full theological reckoning (denials plus Antioch); tonight is the mercy half of that evening's argument, so make it unforgettable.

**The Follow Me thread plants quietly.** "You will stretch out your hands" (21:18-19) points to Peter's death. Say only that ancient Christian tradition, attested from the first century onward, remembers Peter's martyrdom in Rome, by tradition a crucifixion, and that Session Eleven walks there.

## SESSION GOALS

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### 1.

Let the group discover the charcoal fire connection (John 18:18 and 21:9) with their own eyes before any explanation.

### 2.

Walk the threefold restoration: three questions for three denials, each answered with a commission, and open the first sealed blank at the summit.

### 3.

Discover Ezekiel 34 live: divine shepherding and one appointed shepherd as a single promise, fulfilled on the beach.

### 4.

Fix the possessive forever: my lambs, my sheep; vicar-shepherd under the Good Shepherd, with 1 Peter 5 as Peter's own confirmation.

## TIME NOTE

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75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, compress Build 1 and cut Build 8; the agapaō note in Build 5 can shrink to one honest sentence. Protect Build 3, the charcoal fire discovery, and the seal-opening after Build 4 at all costs.

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## PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Opening Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, Good Shepherd, you know how to find us: back in our old boats, empty-handed before dawn. Come stand on our shore tonight. Ask us the only question that matters, as many times as we need, and give us work to do for the flock you love. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

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1.

What is a smell or a sound that instantly transports you somewhere specific in your past? Where does it take you?

2.

After you have seriously let someone down, which is harder: their forgiveness, or being trusted by them with something important again? Why?

## BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

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1.

Read John 21:1-8. Where are the disciples, whose idea was this outing, and what does the whole scene deliberately remind us of? What are they catching before the stranger speaks?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

They are back in Galilee, back on the water, and it is Peter's idea: "I am going fishing," and six others follow him, which is its own small data point about who the others follow even in limbo. They fish all night and catch nothing.

The scene strikingly echoes Luke 5: night toil, empty nets, a voice telling seasoned fishermen to cast again, and a catch too big to handle. The details differ; here Jesus is a stranger on the shore, and the recognition comes from the Beloved Disciple. But the shape is unmistakable. Jesus has rebuilt Peter's first frame. Whatever is about to happen to Peter happens where his story began, as a new beginning, not a scolding sequel.

2.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Read 21:9-14. Breakfast is waiting. Now the homework question: verse 9 mentions a very specific kind of fire, and you were sent to John 18:18 this week. What did you find, and why does it matter?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

The word is *anthrakia*, a charcoal fire, and it appears exactly twice in the entire New Testament: the fire in the high priest's courtyard where Peter warmed himself and denied Jesus three times, and this fire on the beach where Jesus cooks breakfast for him.

Jesus reconstructed the scene of the crime: the same smell in the nostrils, the same light on the face. Smell is the sense most wired to memory; every one of Peter's senses is standing in the courtyard again.

The Lord does not heal by helping us forget. He walks us back to the exact place of the wound, with breakfast.

### 3.

Read 21:15-17 aloud slowly, one question per reader. Count everything: how many questions, what name Jesus uses, what Peter is asked, and what Peter is given after each answer. Why is Peter grieved at the third?

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Three questions, answering three denials, question for denial, and by the third Peter feels the arithmetic: "grieved because he said to him the third time." The name is not Peter but "Simon, son of John," the pre-commission name; the Lord goes beneath the office to the man, back to the day he was first renamed.

And the question is not "are you sorry," not "will you do better," but only "do you love me," the qualification Christ presses above every other, the indispensable heart of the office. Each answer receives not a pardon certificate but a job: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. In Christ's grammar, restoration is recommissioning. He does not merely forgive Peter back to neutral; he hands him the flock.

### 4.

Now stop and name what just happened to Peter's job description. In Session One he was hired to *catch* something. What is the animal now, and what is the verb? Leaders: sealed sheets out, open the first blank, and read the guesses aloud.

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

The fisherman has become a shepherd. Fish are caught once; sheep must be fed, tended, guarded, led, every single day, for life. Evangelization brings them in; shepherding keeps and feeds them, and Peter is now given both ends of the mission.

Honor the correct guesses; this seal was written five sessions ago on the night the group met the fisherman. And notice that the study's own title has been the answer key on the cover the whole time: Feed My Sheep is not a slogan, it is the third sentence of the commission, the fisherman's new job in the Lord's own words.

### 5.

One honest wrinkle before we go deeper. In the Greek, Jesus' first two questions use *agapaō* and Peter answers with *phileō*; the third time Jesus switches to Peter's word. Some hear a drama in the verbs: divine love asked, friendship offered, the Lord stooping to meet Peter. What should we make of it?

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Hold it lightly and honestly: John elsewhere uses the two verbs interchangeably, and many careful readers judge the variation to be John's normal style rather than a hidden ladder. The sermon in the verbs may be real, and it is certainly beautiful, the Lord accepting the love Peter can actually offer, but it

is a grace note, not a load-bearing wall.

The certain freight of the passage needs no Greek: three questions answering three denials beside a rebuilt fire, and Christ's own flock placed in a restored denier's hands. Build on the certain thing.

## 6.

LIVE DISCOVERY. The pronoun is the doctrine, so press it: whose lambs? whose sheep? Then someone find and read 1 Peter 5:1-4, written by tonight's shepherd decades later. How did Peter himself understand the job for the rest of his life?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

My lambs, my sheep, three times: the flock never becomes Peter's property. The Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep (John 10:11) is not resigning; he is appointing a shepherd to tend what remains eternally his. St. Augustine preached exactly this edge: feed them as mine, not yours, or you love yourself and not Christ.

And Peter got it. At the end of his life he writes: "Tend the flock of God that is your charge... not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples... And when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown." Under-shepherds serving the chief Shepherd: the Catholic language of vicar is Peter's own self-understanding, in his own letter. The office holds the crook; the flock belongs to Christ.

## 7.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Someone find and read Ezekiel 34:11-16, and a second reader Ezekiel 34:23. God says "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep," and then says "I will set up over them one shepherd." Is that a contradiction? What is the beach scene doing with this prophecy?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

In Ezekiel's mouth it is one promise, not two rivals: after indicting Israel's failed shepherds, God vows to shepherd the flock himself, and, in the same oracle, to set over them "one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them." Divine shepherding and a single appointed shepherd are how the one promise works.

Christ is the fulfillment of both halves, the divine Shepherd and the Davidic shepherd (John 10). And John 21 extends Ezekiel's pattern before our eyes: the risen Shepherd, standing on the shore in person, sets one shepherd over his flock under himself, in David's restored kingdom (2 Samuel 5:2 made kings shepherds by title). The pattern is even older: when Moses faced death, he asked God for a man over the congregation "that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep which have no shepherd," and Joshua was invested (Numbers 27:15-20). God's answer to shepherdless sheep is an identifiable, commissioned man, under God.

### DIG DEEPER · Follow me, all the way

The commission ends in a prophecy: "when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go," which John glosses plainly: "This he said to

show by what death he was to glorify God." Then, the last word: "Follow me" (21:18-19), the same two words that started everything, now with a cross visible in them. The shepherd's job description includes the shepherd's death, and the Church's ancient and well-attested memory holds where Peter's following ended. Session Eleven walks to that spot; tonight, just feel the weight of a commission that costs everything and was accepted anyway.

## 8.

Last one. Jesus asked a public failure "do you love me" three times and then handed him the most precious thing he owns. What does that tell us about how Christ staffs his Church, and what does it demand of how we see the men who hold the office now?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

It tells us the qualification is love, tested in failure and restored by mercy, not a spotless record; that Christ knowingly entrusts his flock to weak men because his own prayer and presence, not their perfection, secure it; and that the whole arrangement is designed to keep the shepherds humble and the flock's eyes on the chief Shepherd.

And it sets our posture: we owe the shepherds neither cynicism nor worship. We pray for them as men who will answer the beach question about us, and we remember whose sheep we are. The pronoun protects everything: his lambs, his sheep, his Church.

## SEND · TAKING IT WITH US

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### 1.

Where is your charcoal fire, the place, memory, or smell you avoid because a failure lives there? What would it mean to let Jesus make breakfast there?

### 2.

"Do you love me?" is still the only interview question. If Jesus asked you tonight, three times, slowly, what would happen to you by the third asking?

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## LIVE IT THIS WEEK

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### 1.

Pray with John 21:15-17 once this week, out loud, alone: let him ask you all three times, and answer honestly all three times. Write down what he gives you to do.

### 2.

Do one concrete act of feeding this week: bring a meal, catechize a kid, visit someone housebound. Shepherding is calories and time, not sentiment.

### 3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Chief Shepherd, give your under-shepherd love enough for the whole flock, and bring us all home."

#### Closing Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, Good Shepherd, you own the flock and you know how to restore a shepherd. Ask us for love until we can finally say it. Put work for your sheep into our healed hands. And when you call us to follow where we do not wish to go, go with us all the way. Amen.*

**Scripture Memory Verse:** "Simon, son of John, do you love me? ... Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you. ... Feed my sheep." (John 21:17, RSV2CE)

## PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Six, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

### PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Main text, read in units through the Build

#### John 18:18

Live discovery, Build 2: the first charcoal fire

#### Luke 5:1-11

Build 1 callback: the first frame replayed

#### 1 Peter 5:1-4

Live discovery, Build 6: Peter's own under-shepherd theology

#### John 10:11

Build 6: the Good Shepherd owns the flock

#### Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23

Live discovery, Build 7: one promise, one shepherd

#### 2 Samuel 5:2

Build 7: kings as shepherds of Israel

**Numbers 27:15-20**

Build 7: Joshua appointed over the congregation

**CCC 553; 881; 1551**

Catechism Connection

## SESSION SEVEN

# Peter at Pentecost

*Acts 1:12-26; 2:14-42*

## PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Discovery Aim:** Participants discover Peter exercising the office in the Church's first days: standing up among the brethren to fill a vacant apostolic position that Scripture itself calls an office, and then, keys in hand, opening the kingdom to Israel with the Church's first sermon, first altar call, and first three thousand souls.

**Catholic Touchstone:** The apostolic Church in motion. Peter with the Eleven, teaching, governing, and gathering: the shape given at Caesarea Philippi and the beach now runs under its own power, and the vacancy of Judas shows from day one that apostolic office is the kind of thing that gets filled (CCC 731-732; 857; 861).

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Acts is volume two of Luke's Gospel, and its first twelve chapters are structurally Peter's. He speaks first, acts first, answers first, is named first, and stands at the center of every founding scene. Luke is not writing a biography of Peter; he is showing the commissioned office of Luke 22:32 actually strengthening the brethren. Tonight covers the two inaugural exercises: the governance of Acts 1 and the proclamation of Acts 2.

Acts 1:15: "In those days Peter stood up among the brethren (the company of persons was in all about a hundred and twenty)." Between Ascension and Pentecost, before the Spirit has even descended, someone must move first, and it is Peter, unbidden, interpreting Scripture for the community and directing its first act of corporate governance. St. John Chrysostom notices the manner: Peter acts with authority, as the one entrusted with the flock, yet puts the decision to the body; primacy and collegiality in their first joint appearance.

The business at hand is a vacancy. Judas is dead, and Peter rules that the position he abandoned must be filled, quoting the Psalms: "His office let another take" (Acts 1:20, citing Psalm 109:8). The Greek word Luke uses for office is *episkopē*, oversight, the noun whose cognate *episkopos* (overseer) gives English both bishop and episcopacy. Let the group find this with their own eyes: the first assembly of the Church treats apostleship as an *office*, and offices, when vacated, get filled by succession. Matthias is chosen, "and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles" (1:26). Nobody at that meeting thought the Twelve were

twelve irreplaceable personalities; they were twelve seats, and a seat can be filled. This single scene carries most of Session Ten's weight in advance; tonight, just make sure it is seen clearly.

One honest note for precision: the Church did not perpetually replace apostles as eyewitnesses (when James was martyred in Acts 12, no new apostle was chosen). What the Matthias episode establishes is the principle: apostolic ministry is an office capable of transmission, which is exactly how the apostles themselves proceeded when they appointed presbyters in every church (Acts 14:23) and directed men like Titus to appoint presbyters in every town, men Paul in the same breath calls overseers, *episkopoi* (Titus 1:5-7), to carry the ministry forward. The unique eyewitness role died with the Twelve; the office of oversight, *episkopē*, did not. Keep the distinction crisp and the group will be inoculated against a common objection before they ever hear it.

Acts 2: the Spirit descends, and "Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them" (2:14). The picture is the doctrine: one voice, eleven standing with him. The Church's first sermon is Peter interpreting Scripture authoritatively (Joel, Psalm 16, Psalm 110), proclaiming the resurrection, and indicting and inviting the crowd in the same breath. When they are cut to the heart, note carefully to whom the question is addressed: "they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" (2:37). And note who answers: Peter, with the Church's first altar call: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (2:38). Three thousand souls enter, and the kingdom's doors have swung on their hinges: the keys of Matthew 16, used in public, on Israel first. The Gentile door is Session Eight.

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The session ends where Luke ends it, in the four marks of the newborn Church: "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (2:42), doctrine, communion, Eucharist, liturgy, gathered around the apostles with Peter at their head. The parish your group attends on Sunday is this verse, still running.

## OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

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**Psalm 109:8.** "His office let another take": the verse Peter cites to establish that Judas's vacancy must be filled. The Spirit put succession language into the Psalter centuries before the Church needed it.

**Psalm 16:8-11 and Psalm 110:1.** The backbone of the Pentecost sermon: David's flesh seeing no corruption, David's Lord seated at the right hand. Peter's first official teaching act is authoritative interpretation of the Old Testament, the steward ruling on the meaning of the household's documents.

**Joel 2:28-32.** "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh." Peter's opening citation: the last days have begun, the Spirit is democratized, and, as Session Four's Deuteronomy discovery taught us, a Spirit-filled people still comes, by God's own design, with appointed judges and shepherds.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. John Chrysostom** *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles, Homily 3*

Chrysostom watches Peter rise in the upper room and names what he sees: Peter acts with authority in the matter, as the one to whom Christ entrusted the flock, always first to begin, the mouth of the rest. Yet Chrysostom equally admires the manner: he does everything with the common consent, nothing by imperious command, primacy exercised as service among brothers.

#### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Irenaeus of Lyons** *Against Heresies, Book III, chapters 1-4 and 12*

Drawing Book III together, Irenaeus leans on the Pentecost preaching as bedrock: Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed to Israel the crucified and risen Jesus as Lord and Christ, and this public apostolic preaching, delivered before thousands and handed down in the Church, is the standard against which every later novelty is measured. What Peter preached openly at the beginning, the Church guards to the end.

#### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Bede the Venerable** *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*

Bede lingers on the election of Matthias: the office forsaken by the traitor is not abolished but filled, that the mystical number of the twelve, foundation stones of the new Israel, might stand complete. For Bede the lesson is durable: the ministry entrusted to the apostles is greater than the men who fail it, and the Lord provides for his Church's continuance.

### CATECHISM CONNECTION

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**CCC 731-732** frames the day: at Pentecost the Trinity is fully revealed and the Church is manifested to the world; the age of the Church begins, and its first public voice is Peter's.

**CCC 857** gives the three senses in which the Church is apostolic: founded on the apostles, keeping their teaching, and taught, sanctified, and guided by them through their successors, all three visibly assembling in Acts 1 and 2.

**CCC 861** quotes the apostles' own arrangement: in order that the mission entrusted to them might continue after their death, they left successors their own position of teaching authority, a design whose first instance the group watches tonight in the upper room.

### THREAD WATCH

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**The Office thread takes its biggest step.** *Episkopē* in Acts 1:20 is the thread's crown jewel: Scripture itself calls apostleship an office and shows it filled by succession. Let it be discovered, name it clearly, and then bank it: Session Ten spends this capital on the successors of Peter specifically, with Clement and Irenaeus as witnesses. Do not spend it all tonight.

**The Keys thread turns publicly.** Pentecost is the keys opening the kingdom to Israel; Cornelius, next session, is the same keys opening it to the Gentiles. Plant the frame tonight in one sentence and let Session Eight complete it.

**The Strengthened Strengthener.** The coward of the courtyard preaches to thousands in the same city seven weeks later. Luke 22:32 has visibly happened: turned again, he strengthens. If the group does not notice the transformation on their own, ask what changed between the fire and the balcony.

## SESSION GOALS

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### 1.

Watch Peter rise first in Acts 1 and characterize the manner: authority exercised through and with the community, not over it.

### 2.

Discover *episkopē* in Acts 1:20 live: apostleship as an office, and an office as the kind of thing succession fills, with the eyewitness distinction kept honest.

### 3.

Read the Pentecost scene structurally: Peter standing with the Eleven, the crowd's question to Peter and the rest, Peter's answer, and the keys opening Israel's door.

### 4.

Land in Acts 2:42 and let the group recognize their own parish in the Church's first description.

## TIME NOTE

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75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, compress Build 6, the sermon's content, into a leader summary and trim the Dig Deeper. Protect Build 3, the *episkopē* discovery, and Build 7, the question-and-answer structure of 2:37-38.

## PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Opening Prayer:

*Come, Holy Spirit: you turned a courtyard coward into the Church's first preacher in fifty days. Fall on us as you fell on the hundred and twenty. Give us Peter's boldness, the apostles' teaching, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers, and add to our number those who are being saved. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

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1.

Think of a group you have seen in the awkward gap after losing its leader or founder: a team, a parish, a family business. What did those first leaderless days feel like, and what did the group most need?

2.

What is the boldest thing you have ever done in front of a crowd, and what made it possible for you that day?

## BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

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1.

Set the scene: Jesus has ascended, the Spirit has not yet come, and a hundred and twenty believers are waiting in an upper room. Read Acts 1:15-17. In this in-between moment, what happens, who makes it happen, and what is he doing with Scripture?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

"Peter stood up among the brethren." Unbidden, uncommissioned by any vote, before Pentecost itself, Peter rises, addresses the community, and interprets the Psalms authoritatively to explain Judas and direct what must be done. After days of common prayer (1:14), the Church's first deliberative act, its first act of governance, begins with Peter standing up.

St. John Chrysostom noticed both halves of the scene: Peter acts with authority, as the one entrusted with the flock, the mouth of the rest; and he does it among the brethren, proposing, grounding it in Scripture, involving the body. First time out, the office already has its style: primacy that convenes rather than commands. Luke 22:32 is running; turned again, he is strengthening.

2.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Read Acts 1:20, where Peter quotes Psalm 109:8 about Judas's vacancy. Someone read the psalm verse aloud too. What word does Scripture use for what Judas held, and what does Peter conclude must happen to it?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

"His office let another take." The Greek word Luke chooses is *episkopē*: oversight, the noun whose cognate *episkopos* (overseer) gives English its bishop and episcopacy. Scripture's own vocabulary, in the Church's first meeting, calls apostleship an office of oversight.

And Peter's ruling follows from the noun: offices, when vacated, get filled. Nobody in that room treats the Twelve as twelve irreplaceable personalities whose deaths shrink the number forever; they are twelve seats in the government of the new Israel, and a seat can be filled. Let the weight land: succession is not a later Catholic invention reaching backward. It is the agenda item of the Church's first recorded business meeting.

3.

Read Acts 1:21-26. What are the qualifications, how is Matthias chosen, and what happens to him at the end? Then the honest question: when the apostle James is killed in Acts 12, no replacement is chosen. So what exactly did the Matthias episode establish, and what didn't it?

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**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

The candidate must be an eyewitness of the whole ministry, from John's baptism to the Ascension; two are put forward; the community prays; the lot falls to Matthias, "and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles." The Twelve stand complete for Pentecost, the foundation stones of the new Israel at full count.

Now the precision that protects the doctrine: the unique eyewitness role could not be transmitted forever, and the Church never pretended otherwise, which is why James's death brings no second Matthias. What Acts 1 establishes is the principle: apostolic ministry is an *office* capable of transmission, and the apostles acted on that principle for the rest of their lives, appointing presbyters in every church (Acts 14:23) and instructing men like Titus to appoint more (Titus 1:5). The eyewitnesses died; the *episkopē* did not. Hold this distinction; it will carry a whole evening soon.

**4.**

Pentecost. Read Acts 2:14. Before a word of the sermon, look at the picture Luke paints: who lifts up his voice, and what are the others doing? Why does the staging matter?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

"Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice." One voice, eleven standing with him: the picture is the doctrine. Not Peter alone, a lone oracle detached from the college; not twelve simultaneous voices, a committee without a spokesman. The steward speaks; the officers stand with him.

It is the same architecture the study has found everywhere: the mouth of the apostles at Caesarea Philippi, the singular prayer inside the plural sifting, and now the Church's first public word to the world, delivered by Peter, with the Eleven, to Israel. Luke stages his scenes on purpose.

**5.**

Skim the sermon's skeleton in 2:16-36: Joel 2, Psalm 16, Psalm 110. What is Peter actually doing with these texts, and why is that itself an exercise of the office?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

He is ruling on their meaning. Joel's outpouring is happening now; David's psalm about flesh not seeing corruption cannot mean David, whose tomb is with us, and so prophesies the Christ's resurrection; David's Lord at the right hand is Jesus, "whom you crucified," now made "both Lord and Christ." This is authoritative interpretation of the household's documents, the steward's core competence, exercised before thousands.

And notice the sermon's engine is the Resurrection preached by an eyewitness: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses" (2:32). St. Irenaeus treats this public preaching as the Church's measuring rod ever after: what was proclaimed openly at the beginning judges every later novelty.

## 6.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Read Acts 2:37-38 and watch the addresses like a lawyer. When the crowd is cut to the heart, to whom exactly is their question directed? And who answers it, with what instructions?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

"They said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" The crowd, taught by the scene itself, addresses the college with Peter named at its head. And the answer comes from Peter, singular, for all: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The Church's first pastoral directive: repentance, baptism, forgiveness, the Spirit, and it is Peter who issues it. Three thousand souls enter through that door. Now name what you are watching in Matthew 16 terms: the keys, turning in public, opening the kingdom to Israel. There is one more door those keys must open, the biggest one, and it is next week's whole evening.

### DIG DEEPER · Fifty days from the courtyard

Measure the distance: seven weeks earlier, in this same city, this man crumbled before a servant girl beside a charcoal fire. Now he stands before thousands, publicly indicts the city that just executed his Lord, "this Jesus, whom you crucified" (2:36), and calls it to repentance, with the authorities who arranged the crucifixion within earshot. Nothing in Peter's natural equipment changed; what changed is Pentecost. The office's boldness is the Spirit's gift, not the man's temperament, which is precisely why it could survive the man, and every man after him.

## 7.

Read Acts 2:41-42 and slow down on the four things the newborn Church devoted itself to. Name them one by one, translate each into its present-day form, and then answer honestly: where have you seen this verse lately?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

The apostles' teaching: doctrine, the deposit, today's Magisterium and catechesis. Fellowship, *koinonia*: the common life and communion of the Church. The breaking of the bread: Luke's name for the Eucharist. The prayers: the liturgy, fixed hours, the worship of the community. Doctrine, communion, Eucharist, liturgy, gathered around the apostles with Peter at their head.

You have seen this verse every Sunday of your life: it is a description of the Mass and the Catholic parish, still running on the original four cylinders. The Church did not evolve away from Acts 2:42 into Catholicism; Acts 2:42 simply kept meeting, for twenty centuries, and three thousand joined on day one.

## SEND · TAKING IT WITH US

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## 1.

Peter's boldness was Pentecost's gift, not his personality. Where in your life are you waiting to feel brave when what you actually need is to ask for the Holy Spirit?

2.

The crowd asked "what shall we do?" and got a concrete answer. If you asked that question tonight about your own next step with God, what concrete answer do you already suspect?

## LIVE IT THIS WEEK

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1.

Read the whole Pentecost sermon, Acts 2:14-41, out loud once this week, standing up. Notice what it feels like in the body to proclaim rather than just read.

2.

Live Acts 2:42 deliberately for seven days: one act of study (the teaching), one act of fellowship, one Mass beyond Sunday if you can (the breaking of bread), and one fixed time of daily prayer.

3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Lord, as you filled Peter at Pentecost, fill his successor with boldness and your Church with three thousand more."

### Closing Prayer:

*Holy Spirit, you found a hundred and twenty waiting and made them the Church. Devote us to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Cut us to the heart, tell us what to do, and add to your Church daily those who are being saved.*

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Amen.

**Scripture Memory Verse:** "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42, RSV2CE)

## PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Seven, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

### PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Main text one, Builds 1-3: the upper room and the vacancy

### Psalm 109:8

Live discovery, Build 2: his office let another take

**Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5**

Build 3: the apostles transmit the office

**Acts 2:14-42**

Main text two, Builds 4-8: Pentecost

**Joel 2:28-32; Psalm 16:8-11; Psalm 110:1**

Build 5: the sermon's Old Testament backbone

**Acts 2:37-38**

Live discovery, Build 6: the question and the answer

**Acts 12:1-2**

Build 3: James's death, the honest distinction

**CCC 731-732; 857; 861**

**Luke 22:31-32**

**Matthew 16:18-19**

Catechism Connection

Build 1 and Thread Watch: the strengthened strengthener

Build 6 and Thread Watch: the keys frame for Pentecost

## SESSION EIGHT

# Peter Decides

*Acts 10:1-48; 11:1-18; 15:1-29*

## PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Discovery Aim:** Participants discover the keys opening their greatest door, the Gentiles, through Peter at Cornelius's house, and then watch the Church's first council settle its first doctrinal crisis: hard cases going up, much debate, Peter rising, the assembly falling silent, James applying, and a letter that binds. The steelman that James, not Peter, presided gets its full day in court.

**Catholic Touchstone:** Primacy inside collegiality. The Council of Jerusalem is the Catholic shape of authority in a single chapter: in the traditional Catholic reading, the steward settles the doctrine, the college and the local bishop own the decision with him, and the letter speaks for the Holy Spirit and the Church together (CCC 85-87; 880-883).

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Acts 10 is the hinge of the whole book, and Luke marks it by telling the story twice (chapters 10 and 11) and referencing it a third time (chapter 15). The question is the biggest the apostolic Church ever faced: can the Gentiles come in as Gentiles? And the answer arrives through one man, on a rooftop in Joppa, three times, because Peter argues with heaven: "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean" (10:14). The vision of the sheet, the Spirit's instruction, Cornelius's parallel vision, and the Spirit falling on the household mid-homily all converge on Peter's ruling: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality" (10:34), and his command: "he commanded them to be baptized" (10:48). The largest door in salvation history swings, and the hand on the key is Peter's, exactly as he himself will later summarize: "God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe" (15:7).

Acts 11 adds a note that keeps Catholic theology honest: when Peter returns to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticizes him, and Peter does not thunder about his office; he explains, step by step, and the church is satisfied: "they glorified God" (11:18). Primacy in Acts is accountable, persuasive, and exercised among brethren. The office never floats free of the body.

Acts 15 is the destination the whole study has been driving toward since Deuteronomy 17. Men from Judea teach that Gentile converts must be circumcised to be saved; Paul and Barnabas dissent sharply; and the church does exactly what the Torah prescribed for hard cases: they go *up*, to Jerusalem, to the

apostles and the elders (15:2). Make sure the group hears the echo themselves: this is Deuteronomy's pattern, a living authority receiving the case Scripture alone had not settled among sincere believers.

The council's sequence deserves frame-by-frame attention. "After there had been much debate, Peter rose" (15:7): open argument first, then the steward stands. His speech settles the doctrinal principle: God chose that the Gentiles hear through his mouth, God gave them the Spirit "and made no distinction," and the punchline that startles everyone who thinks Catholics fear the sentence: "we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (15:11). Salvation by grace, ruled from the chair of Peter, at the first council. Then Luke's stage direction: "And all the assembly kept silence" (15:12). Luke narrates no further debate after Peter finishes; what follows is testimony (Barnabas and Paul) and application (James).

Now the steelman, and give it everything: many Protestant readers argue James presided. The evidence is real: James speaks last; he says "my judgment is" (15:19); he is the local bishop of Jerusalem, and even St. John Chrysostom notes that James, as bishop there, fittingly speaks last. Honor all of it. Then press with the text's own structure: the doctrinal question is settled by Peter's speech, after which the assembly falls silent and nobody debates again; James opens by citing Peter as his premise ("Symeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles," 15:14) and adds Amos in support; and his "judgment" (krinō, "I judge"; the verb's range runs from "I am of the opinion" to "I decide," so it cannot by itself settle whether James is ruling or proposing; the structure of the scene has to do that work) concerns the pastoral application, the four abstentions that make table fellowship workable. The final letter comes from "the apostles and the elders" together (15:23). What Acts 15 actually shows is not James over Peter or Peter alone: it is doctrine settled by the steward, application shaped by the local bishop, and the decision owned by the whole college. That is not a defeat for the Catholic structure; it is a diagram of it.

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The letter's warrant is the boldest sentence any church body has ever mailed: "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things" (15:28). The council speaks its ruling in the Spirit's name and binds churches its members had never visited. The great councils, from Nicaea onward, have looked back to that sentence as their model, and Catholic teaching documents still echo its grammar.

One honest boundary: Acts 15 is one council in one decade, and it will not carry the entire papal edifice alone; the development of how primacy operated across the first centuries is Session Ten's evidence and Session Twelve's precision. Tonight establishes the pattern at the source: hard cases go up, Peter's mouth settles, the college binds, the Spirit signs.

## OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

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**Deuteronomy 17:8-13.** The Torah's hard cases go up to the appointed authority, whose verdict binds. Acts 15:2, "they were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question," is the pattern executing in the New Covenant, and your group found the pattern themselves four sessions ago.

**Amos 9:11-12.** James's citation: the rebuilt booth of David under which "all the Gentiles who are called by my name" gather. The council reads the Gentile influx as the restoration of the Davidic kingdom, the same kingdom whose steward received the keys.

**Genesis 9 and Leviticus 17-18.** Many interpreters connect the four abstentions of the council's letter (idol food, blood, things strangled, unchastity) with the rules Leviticus 17-18 applied to sojourners living among Israel; on that reading, the decree's mercy was ancient, targeted, and pastoral, easing shared tables between Jewish and Gentile believers. The precise rationale is debated.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. John Chrysostom** *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles, on the Council*

Chrysostom marvels at the order of the assembly: there is no arrogance in the Church. Peter, entrusted with the flock, speaks first among them and with power; Paul and Barnabas are heard without interruption; and James, as bishop of Jerusalem, fittingly speaks last to apply what has been declared. For Chrysostom the council's beauty is that authority and brotherhood breathe together, each voice in its place.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Jerome** *Letter 15, to Pope Damasus*

Writing from the Syrian desert amid a three-way schism over the see of Antioch, Jerome asks the bishop of Rome to tell him with whom to communicate, and gives his reason: I follow no leader but Christ, but I am in communion with the chair of Peter; on that rock I know the Church is built. When the hard case arose, the instinct of the fourth century's greatest biblical scholar was the instinct of Acts 15: take it up, to Peter's chair.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Cyprian of Carthage** *Letter 59, to Pope Cornelius*

Cyprian names the see of Rome the chair of Peter and the principal church, the source from which the unity of the priesthood took its rise, and he is indignant that schismatics dare to sail to Rome, as if unity's own source could be enlisted against unity. Cyprian's full ecclesiology is debated (he would later clash with Pope Stephen), but in this letter the chair of Peter stands as the visible reference point of the episcopate's unity.

## CATECHISM CONNECTION

**CCC 85-87** returns tonight with new depth: the living teaching office interprets the Word authentically, serving it and not surpassing it, and Acts 15 is that office's first plenary session.

**CCC 880-883 describes the permanent structure the council displays: the college of bishops with Peter's successor at its head. The college has no authority unless united with the pope as**

**its head (CCC 883), while the pope himself holds full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, which he can always exercise freely (CCC 882).**

**CCC 890** names the purpose under it all: the Magisterium exists to guard God's people from deviations and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error, exactly what the council's letter did for the churches of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.

## THREAD WATCH

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**The Keys thread completes its opening arc.** Pentecost opened Israel's door; Cornelius opens the Gentiles'. Peter will summarize both with his own mouth at the council (15:7). After tonight the keys have done what Matthew 16 promised; what remains for the study is how the office continues, fails, and endures.

**The Deuteronomy 17 thread pays off.** "They went up to Jerusalem about this question" is the payoff of Session Four's cold discovery. Let a group member make the connection before you do; someone will.

**The Failing Steward thread stands one week from its reckoning.** Tonight shows Peter at his height. Next session opens with Galatians 2, Peter rebuked by Paul, and the group's hardest and most liberating evening. If anyone mentions Antioch tonight, smile and say: bring that exact passage next week.

## SESSION GOALS

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### 1.

Watch the Gentile door open through Peter: the triple vision, the ruling at Cornelius's house, and the accountable explanation in Acts 11.

### 2.

Recognize Deuteronomy 17's pattern in Acts 15:2 without leader prompting.

### 3.

Reconstruct the council's sequence frame by frame: debate, Peter rises, silence, testimony, James applies, the letter binds.

### 4.

Steelman the James-presided reading honestly and resolve it structurally with the traditional Catholic reading: doctrine by the steward, application by the local bishop, decision by the college, warrant by the Spirit.

## TIME NOTE

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75 to 90 minutes. This is a two-chapter night; keep Acts 10-11 to twenty-five minutes (Builds 1-3) so the council gets the full second half. If time runs short, compress Build 2 and cut the Dig Deeper. Protect Builds 5 through 7, the council sequence and steelman, absolutely.

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## PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Opening Prayer:

*Holy Spirit, you taught the Church her boldest sentence: it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. Open our eyes tonight as you opened Peter's on the rooftop. Tear down the partitions we still keep, and give your Church, in our day as in the first, decisions that free and a unity that holds. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

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1.

Have you ever been part of a group decision where, after everyone had argued, one person's word visibly settled the room? What gave their word that weight?

2.

What is a conviction you once held firmly that God had to dismantle in you more than once before it finally gave way?

### BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

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1.

Read Acts 10:9-16. Describe the rooftop scene: what does Peter see, what is he told, how does he answer God, and how many rounds does it take? What is really being decided up there?

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

A sheet from heaven full of every kind of creature, the command "Rise, Peter; kill and eat," and Peter arguing with heaven: "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." It happens three times, because Peter is Peter, and the voice answers: "What God has cleansed, you must not call common" (10:15).

The menu is the parable; the guest list is the point, and Peter says so once he understands: "God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (10:28). The question on the rooftop is the biggest the apostolic Church will ever face: can the nations come in as they are? And notice where heaven chose to deliver the answer: not to the Twelve in plenary, not to Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, but to the man with the keys.

## 2.

Read Acts 10:34-48. What happens in the middle of Peter's homily, and what does Peter then command? Frame it in Matthew 16 language: what just happened to the biggest locked door in the world?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

"Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality": Peter rules the principle, and while he is still speaking, the Holy Spirit falls on the whole Gentile household, tongues and all, heaven countersigning mid-sentence. Peter draws the only possible conclusion, "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people?", and "he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (10:47-48).

In Matthew 16 language: the keys just opened the Gentile door, the largest in salvation history, and the hand on the key was Peter's. He will state it exactly this way himself at the council: "God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe" (15:7). Pentecost opened Israel; Caesarea opens the world; both through the same mouth, on purpose.

## 3.

Read Acts 11:1-4, 18. Peter comes home to criticism from the circumcision party. Watch his response carefully: what does he *not* say, what does he do instead, and how does it end? What does this scene teach about how primacy actually behaves?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

He does not say "I hold the keys, case closed." He explains, "in order," step by step: the vision, the Spirit's instruction, the parallel vision of Cornelius, the Spirit falling "just as on us at the beginning." And the critics are won: "When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God" (11:18).

Primacy in Acts is accountable and persuasive, exercised among brethren, never over them: Session Five's "leader as one who serves" in administrative form. File this scene next to next week's texts: the office that can explain itself can also be questioned, and even, as we will see, rebuked, without the office dissolving. The Catholic claim was never that the steward floats above the household.

## 4.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Now the crisis. Read Acts 15:1-2. What is being taught in Antioch, what would it mean if true, and what does the church do with the dispute? Someone should be hearing an echo from Session Four; name it.

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Men from Judea teach the Gentile converts: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." If true, the Gospel is Torah plus Jesus, and every Gentile baptism Peter and Paul performed was incomplete. Paul and Barnabas dissent with "no small dissension and debate," and sincere believers with Scriptures in hand cannot settle it locally.

So they do what Israel was always commanded to do with hard cases: "they were appointed to go *up* to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question." That is Deuteronomy 17:8-13, the passage

this group read cold a month ago: when the case is too hard, go up to the appointed authority, whose verdict binds. The New Covenant kept the pattern and staffed it with apostles.

## 5.

Read Acts 15:6-12 frame by frame. What happens first in the council? Then who rises, and what does his speech actually settle? Quote verse 11 out loud and let it surprise you. And what is the assembly doing when he finishes?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

First, "much debate": the Church argues openly, and the text is not embarrassed by it. Then "Peter rose," and his speech settles the doctrine at its root: God chose that the Gentiles hear the Gospel "by my mouth," God gave them the Spirit "and made no distinction between us and them," so putting the yoke back on is "making trial of God." And verse 11, from the chair of Peter at the Church's first council: "we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." Salvation by grace is a Petrine ruling before it was ever a Reformation slogan; Catholics should quote it first, not flinch from it.

Then Luke's stage direction: "And all the assembly kept silence" (15:12). Luke records no further debate after Peter finishes. The Catholic reading takes that silence seriously: what follows is not counter-argument but testimony (Barnabas and Paul) and application (James), and the final decision issues from the apostles and elders with the whole church (15:22).

## 6.

Steelman chain, full strength. Your Protestant friend says: "Look who actually presides: *James* speaks last, James says 'my judgment is' (15:19), and the council follows James's proposal. If anyone is pope in Acts 15, it is James, not Peter." Build his case as well as he would, including the detail that even St. John Chrysostom notes James, as bishop of Jerusalem, fittingly speaks last.

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Give it everything it deserves: James really does speak last, in the host's position; "my judgment is" really is his phrase; the four abstentions in the letter really are his proposal; and the ancient Church itself remembered James as bishop of Jerusalem presiding in his own see, Chrysostom says exactly that. And notice that James's judgment in 15:19 is not only the four abstentions; it is "that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God," the substantive decision itself, in the form the council adopts. Any Catholic account that erases James is doing apologetics instead of exegesis, and your friend is right to be suspicious of it.

Now the structure, piece by piece. What did James's speech decide? He opens by citing Peter's ruling as his settled premise ("Symeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles," 15:14), adds Amos in confirmation, and then formulates the decision on that basis: do not trouble them, ask only the four abstentions widely read as making shared tables workable. James frames the decree; but the doctrinal premise he frames it on is the one Peter established before the assembly fell silent, and nobody, including James, reopens it. The Catholic claim is not that James did nothing decisive; it is that his decisive formulation builds on, rather than contests, the steward's ruling. And the letter issues from "the apostles and the elders" together (15:23). So Acts 15 is not James over Peter, and it is not Peter alone

either: it is doctrine settled by the steward, application shaped by the local bishop, the decision owned by the whole college. Your friend has not found a problem with the Catholic structure. He has found a photograph of it.

## 7.

Read the letter's warrant, Acts 15:28-29, out loud: "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." Sit with that sentence. What is the council claiming, whom does the letter bind, and where have you heard this grammar since?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

The council claims that its human deliberation, debate, testimony, ruling, application, issued in a decision the Holy Spirit himself co-signs: good to the Spirit *and* to us, one verdict with two authors. And it binds believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, churches most of the signers had never visited, who receive it and rejoice (15:31).

The councils from Nicaea onward have looked back to that sentence as their model, and Catholic teaching documents still speak its grammar. Notice also what the binding produced: not burden but liberty, "no greater burden than these necessary things." The office exists to open doors and lift yokes; when it binds, it binds so that consciences across the world can finally rest on the same answer (CCC 890).

### DIG DEEPER · Paul checks his Gospel

Paul, of all people, describes making his own trip up: "I went up by revelation... and I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain" (Galatians 2:2), and he names the pillars who gave him and Barnabas "the right hand of fellowship": James and Cephas and John (2:9). Paul insists those of repute "added nothing to me" (2:6); his Gospel came from Christ, not from them, and yet he still laid it before them "lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain." The apostle of Gentile freedom, personally commissioned by the risen Christ, still sought the communion of the pillars for his mission. Independence from that communion never occurred to him as an option, which makes his rebuke of Peter in the very next paragraph all the more interesting. Next week.

## 8.

Zoom out over both chapters. Between the rooftop, the accountability scene, and the council, assemble the study's most complete picture yet: how does authority actually work in the apostolic Church?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Heaven initiates and the office responds: the ruling on the Gentiles was God's act delivered through Peter's mouth, not Peter's innovation. The steward decides and explains: keys used at Caesarea, then an accounting given in Jerusalem. Hard cases go up, exactly as the Torah taught; debate is open and unembarrassed; Peter's word settles doctrine; the local bishop shapes application; the college binds together; and the letter speaks for the Spirit and the Church in one breath.

Primacy inside collegiality, authority as service, binding that liberates: the Catholic shape, visible already around the year 49, a reading of the scene the Church has held from Chrysostom onward, even though the exact division of roles at Jerusalem is not itself defined doctrine. What the study must face next is the harder question the New Testament also refuses to hide: what happens when the man holding this office fails, publicly, after all of it? Bring Galatians 2. Bring your questions about bad popes. Next week is for them.

## SEND · TAKING IT WITH US

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### 1.

God showed Peter the sheet three times, and Peter answered heaven with "No, Lord." Where is God repeating himself to you right now, and what is your version of "No, Lord"?

### 2.

The council bound the churches so consciences could rest on one answer. Is there a settled teaching you keep re-litigating privately, and what would it mean to let the question actually rest?

## LIVE IT THIS WEEK

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### 1.

Read Acts 15:1-31 once more this week and mark every speaker in the margin: debate, Peter, silence, testimony, James, letter. Teach the sequence to one person in your life; it takes three minutes and it reframes everything.

### 2.

Peter's partiality died on a rooftop. Identify one category of person you quietly treat as "common or unclean," and do one deliberate act of table fellowship this week.

### 3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Lord, give your Church councils like the first one: bold debate, clear rulings, and burdens no heavier than necessary."

### Closing Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, you opened Israel's door and the nations' door through the same weak, willing man. Thank you for a Church that can settle what Scripture's sincere readers dispute, and for verdicts the Spirit signs. Make us quick to go up with our hard cases, and quicker to rejoice when the answer comes. Amen.*

**Scripture Memory Verse:** "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things." (Acts 15:28, RSV2CE)

## PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Eight, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

**PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED**

Main text one, Builds 1-2: the sheet and Cornelius's house

**Acts 11:1-18**

Build 3: accountable primacy

**Acts 15:1-29**

Main text two, Builds 4-8: the council

**Deuteronomy 17:8-13**

Build 4 payoff: hard cases go up

**Acts 15:7, 11**

Builds 5-6: Peter's ruling, grace alone from the chair

**Amos 9:11-12**

Leader background: James's citation, David's booth rebuilt

**Genesis 9; Leviticus 17-18**

Leader background: the four abstentions' roots

**Galatians 2:1-9**

Dig Deeper: Paul checks his Gospel with the pillars

**CCC 85-87; 880-883; 890**

Catechism Connection

## SESSION NINE

# The Failing Rock

*Matthew 16:21-23; Luke 22:54-62; Galatians 2:11-14*

## PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Discovery Aim:** Participants face Peter's failures with completely open eyes: rebuked as Satan five verses after being named rock, denying three times by the fire, and opposed to his face by Paul at Antioch. They discover that Scripture itself, not Catholic damage control, distinguishes the office from the perfection of its holder, and that Peter's failures are failures of conduct and courage, never official rulings that bound the Church to error.

**Catholic Touchstone:** Infallibility is not impeccability. Christ's minister remains a sinner whose weakness does not destroy what Christ guarantees through the office (CCC 1550): the peg of Isaiah 22:25, Moses' seat, and Christ's prayer for a faith, not a flawlessness, all converge tonight.

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Tonight is the session the whole study has been promising, and its method matters: do not defend Peter. Read every failure at full volume, let the group feel the scandal, and then let Scripture itself make the distinctions. The Catholic position does not survive these texts by softening them; it is built out of them.

Failure one, Matthew 16:21-23: five verses after "you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church," the same voice says "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me." The word for hindrance is *skandalon*, a stumbling stone. Matthew has placed rock and stumbling stone within one paragraph on purpose: the foundation stone, speaking from "the side of men," can become a rock to trip on. The office was five verses old when Scripture taught the Church to distinguish the man's charism from the man's opinions.

Failure two, Luke 22:54-62: the denials, in the courtyard, beside the fire (the fire John's Gospel identifies as a charcoal fire, John 18:18, deliberately matched by the charcoal fire on the beach, 21:9), exactly as predicted at the table where the commission was given. Your group has already lived the restoration of this failure (Session Six); tonight they must feel its full weight first: the rock, publicly, three times, with oaths in Matthew's telling, denying he ever knew the man. And the detail that breaks the heart: "the Lord turned and looked at Peter" (22:61). Then the weeping that proved the faith survived the courage.

Failure three, and the crown jewel of every Protestant case: Galatians 2:11-14. At Antioch, Peter ate freely with Gentile Christians until "certain men came from James"; then "he drew back and separated

himself, fearing the circumcision party," and his gravity dragged others with him, "even Barnabas." Paul "opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned," publicly: "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" Read it without flinching. A junior apostle rebuked the keeper of the keys, in front of everyone, and was right to do it.

Now the anatomy, and it decides everything: what exactly was Peter's Antioch error? Not his teaching. Peter's doctrine on this precise question was already on the record and already correct: the rooftop, Cornelius, "God shows no partiality" (Acts 10), all before Antioch on any chronology. And his declaration before the council that Jews and Gentiles alike "shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 15:11), after which "all the assembly kept silence" (15:12), confirms the same position rather than reversing it, whether the council fell before or after Antioch, a chronology scholars genuinely debate. Paul's own charge sheet confirms it: he accuses Peter of *hypocrisy*, *hypokrisis* is Paul's actual word (2:13), of not walking "in line with the truth of the gospel" (2:14). Hypocrisy means betraying your own true teaching with your behavior. Peter never taught circumcision was necessary; he caved to a lunch-table intimidation and his conduct preached what his doctrine denied. The distinction is not Catholic fine print; it is the plain grammar of Paul's accusation.

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This is why the Church's claim was always narrower than her critics assume and narrower than some Catholics assume: no promise of sinless popes, prudent popes, brave popes, or pleasant popes. The claim, whose seed is Christ praying for Peter's *faith* (Luke 22:32) and the Father revealing Peter's *confession* (Matthew 16:17), concerns the protected official confession of the faith, and Session Twelve will define its exact, restrictive shape. Tonight's business is the ground under it: Scripture shows the first pope sinning against his own true doctrine and being publicly corrected by a colleague; every piece of that is in the text. Peter's acceptance of the correction is not narrated in Galatians; it is the verdict of the wider record: Peter never answers the charge, the churches preserved Paul's account, and Peter later calls Paul "our beloved brother" (2 Peter 3:15). What is certain in the text is that he remained the rock.

Be ready for the extension the group will rightly make: and the successors? Say it plainly: some popes lived scandalously, and Catholics should be the first, not the last, to say so; fraternal correction of popes is a Catholic tradition with saints in it, St. Catherine of Siena wrote letters to a pope that would curl your hair. The claim history must test is precise: that no pope, including the worst men to hold the office, ever bound the whole Church to heresy by an official definitive act. That is the Catholic claim, and it has been tested: the classic hard case is Pope Honorius I, condemned after his death for negligence in the monothelite crisis; Catholics answer that his private letters were not definitive acts binding the whole Church, the very distinction tonight's texts teach. Session Twelve will equip you for that case. That precise claim has held for twenty centuries through some spectacularly bad men, which is either a very long coincidence or Luke 22:32 doing what it says.

## OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

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**2 Samuel 12:1-13.** Nathan before David: "You are the man." The Lord's anointed king, guilty of adultery and murder, is rebuked to his face by a prophet, repents, and remains king. Israel already knew that God's offices survive God's rebukes of the men in them; David's psalm of repentance became the whole Church's prayer. Tonight's key live discovery.

**Isaiah 22:25.** The peg fastened in a sure place gives way: the steward's own oracle ends with the steward judged. Your group banked this verse in Session Three for exactly tonight.

**Numbers 20:10-12.** Even Moses, at Meribah, fails in faith before the people and is barred from the land, yet remains the mediator of the covenant to his last day. The pattern is ancient: God disciplines his officers without demolishing their offices.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Augustine** *Letter 82, to St. Jerome*

In their famous dispute over Antioch, Jerome suggested the confrontation was staged for effect; Augustine insisted it was real, because Scripture does not lie, and then drew the lesson that settles tonight: Peter, by humbly accepting public correction from a junior colleague, left the Church a rarer and holier example than Paul's boldness in giving it. It is a greater thing, Augustine says, to be corrected well than to correct well.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Cyprian of Carthage** *Letter 71*

Cyprian points to Antioch as the office's true style: Peter, whom the Lord chose first and on whom he built his Church, did not answer Paul's challenge by insolently claiming his primacy and demanding obedience from a latecomer; he yielded to truth presented rightly. For Cyprian the scene disgraces neither Peter nor the primacy; it displays the humility that makes the primacy Christian.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Catherine of Siena** *Letters to Pope Gregory XI*

A thirty-year-old laywoman and future Doctor of the Church wrote to the pope himself with astonishing frankness, urging him to return his see to Rome, to be a courageous man and not a coward, and to uproot the corruption around him, all while calling him sweet Christ on earth and never once wavering in reverence for the office. Catherine is the permanent Catholic proof that fierce correction and full communion are not opposites.

## CATECHISM CONNECTION

**CCC 1550** says tonight's thesis outright: the presence of Christ in the minister is not to be understood as if the minister were preserved from all human weaknesses, from error, even from sin; the power of the Holy Spirit does not guarantee all the acts of ministers in the same way.

**CCC 890-891** previews next session's precision: the charism that protects the Church's faith is bounded, specific, and ordered to the deposit of faith, not a general insurance policy on everything a pope says or does.

**CCC 1429 points to St. Peter's conversion after his denial as a witness to the ongoing interior conversion every Christian needs. Tonight's reflection draws the thread further: the first pope is also the New Covenant's first great penitent.**

## THREAD WATCH

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**The Failing Steward thread resolves tonight.** Every planting pays off: the peg of Isaiah 22:25, Moses' seat, the prayer for faith rather than flawlessness, the charcoal fires. Name each connection as the group finds it; this is the night the study's architecture becomes visible to them.

**The Revealed Confession thread reaches its penultimate step.** Tonight establishes what the charism is *not* (impeccability, wisdom, courage); Session Twelve defines what it *is*. End the night pointing forward explicitly: we have cleared the ground, next time we build the definition.

**Pastoral watch.** Someone in your group has been wounded by a priest, a bishop, or a scandal headline, tonight or long ago. This session can be the most healing of the twelve if the failures are named honestly, or the most damaging if they are minimized. Do not minimize. The Gospel writers did not.

## SESSION GOALS

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**1.**

Read all three failures at full volume without defensive softening: Satan, the denials, Antioch.

**2.**

Perform the anatomy of Antioch from Paul's own words: hypocrisy against Peter's own true doctrine, conduct versus teaching.

**3.**

Discover the Nathan-and-David pattern live: God's offices survive God's rebukes of the men in them.

**4.**

Distinguish precisely what was never promised (impeccability) from what was (a prayed-for faith and a protected confession), setting up Session Twelve.

## TIME NOTE

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75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, compress Build 2, the denials, since Session Six covered the restoration, and cut Build 8. Protect Build 4, the anatomy of Antioch, and Build 6, the steelman; they are the reason this session exists.

## PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

## Opening Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, you built your Church on a man you would rebuke, restore, and rebuke again through a brother. Give us tonight the honesty of the Gospels, which hid nothing, and the hope of the Gospels, which despaired of no one. Where your Church's shepherds have wounded any of us, meet us in it. Your grace is sufficient. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

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1.

Who is allowed to correct you, really correct you, and survive? What did it take for them to earn that place?

2.

Has an institution you loved ever been disgraced by its leaders? Without naming wounds you would rather not, what did it do to your trust in the institution itself?

## BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

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1.

Read Matthew 16:18, then keep reading straight through 16:21-23 without stopping. Count the verses between "you are Peter, and on this rock" and "Get behind me, Satan." What is Matthew doing by placing these side by side, and what is Peter's actual mistake?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Five verses. The rock becomes, in Jesus' own word, a *skandalon*, a stumbling stone, "a hindrance to me," because Peter, horrified by the prediction of the cross, sets his mind "not on the side of God, but of men." His mistake is not malice; it is theology by human instinct: a Messiah too loved to be allowed to suffer.

Matthew's placement is deliberate catechesis: the Church was never given one verse to read without the other. The foundation stone, speaking his own mind from the side of men, can be a rock to trip over; speaking the Father's revelation, he is the rock to build on. The distinction between the man's charism and the man's opinions is as old as the office itself, five verses old, to be exact.

2.

You read Luke 22:54-62 this week. Someone read verses 60-62 aloud now, slowly. We already know the beach restores this. But tonight, before restoration: how bad is this, actually? And what does verse 61, the look, do to you?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Say it at full volume: the rock, publicly, three times, with oaths in Matthew's account, denies knowing Jesus at all, hours after "I am ready to go with you to prison and to death," while Jesus is being beaten within earshot. There is no softer reading; the evangelists, writing in the church Peter led, published it

anyway, which is itself remarkable: this church tells the whole truth about its first leader.

"And the Lord turned and looked at Peter." No word, just the face. And Peter "went out and wept bitterly," the weeping that separates him from Judas forever: contrition, not despair. The office's first holder is the New Covenant's first great penitent (CCC 1429), and the Church has been a communion of weeping-and-returning people ever since.

### 3.

Now Antioch. Read Galatians 2:11-14 aloud, all of it, and do not soften a syllable. Lay out the scene: what had Peter been doing, what changed, who got dragged along, and what did Paul do about it?

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Peter, in Antioch, had been eating freely with Gentile believers, exactly what his rooftop vision taught. Then "certain men came from James," and Peter "drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party." His gravity did the rest: "the rest of the Jews acted insincerely with him... even Barnabas was carried away." And Paul "opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned," publicly, "before them all."

Feel the full scandal before anyone resolves it: the keeper of the keys, corrected in public by a colleague who had persecuted the Church while Peter was already an apostle, and the correction was *right*. If the Catholic claim cannot survive this passage read at full volume, it cannot survive. So now we do the anatomy.

### 4.

The anatomy. Two questions decide everything, so take them slowly. First: what was Peter's *doctrine* on Jew- Gentile table fellowship and salvation, on the record, before and after Antioch? Second: what is the exact word Paul uses for Peter's sin in verse 13, and what does that word suggest about what Peter actually believed?

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Peter's doctrine was correct and public: "God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:28), "God shows no partiality" (10:34), both before Antioch on any chronology; and his council declaration that all "shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (15:11) confirms the same position, whether the council fell before or after Antioch, a chronology scholars genuinely debate. Peter never taught, ruled, or defined that Gentiles must judaize. On this question his teaching was the orthodox position Paul was defending.

And Paul's word is *hypokrisis*, hypocrisy, insincerity: "the rest of the Jews acted insincerely *with him*." Hypokrisis means play-acting: conduct at odds with one's real conviction. You can only be a hypocrite about a truth you actually hold. Paul's charge is not "you teach falsely" but "you are not walking in line with the truth of the gospel," the truth Peter himself had voiced. Read alongside Acts 10, the natural sense of Paul's own word is that Peter's behavior betrayed his own true position. Peter's failure at Antioch is cowardice at a lunch table, behavior preaching what his doctrine denied. That is grave, scandalous, and correctable, and it is not an official act binding the Church to error. The distinction is not Catholic fine print; it is the grammar of Paul's own accusation.

## 5.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Someone find and read 2 Samuel 12:1-7 and 12:13. Nathan and David: what does the prophet do to the Lord's anointed king, what does the king do, and, the question that matters tonight, what happens to David's *crown*?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Nathan walks into the throne room and tells the king a parable, then detonates it: "You are the man." Adultery and murder, named to the anointed's face. And David does the one thing that saves him: "I have sinned against the LORD," no defense, no execution of the prophet, just Psalm 51 for the rest of history.

And the crown stays. David is chastised terribly, but he remains the Lord's anointed, the covenant with his house stands, and the Messiah still comes from his line. Israel already knew what tonight teaches: God's offices survive God's rebukes of the men in them, because the office was God's idea and the rebuke is God's mercy. Antioch is Nathan-and-David in the New Covenant: prophet-like correction, penitent office-holder, office intact. And notice which role Augustine says was harder and holier: Peter's, the being-corrected-well.

## 6.

Full steelman, and give it teeth. Your friend says: "This settles it against Rome. Paul treats Peter as a peer to be corrected, not an infallible head to be obeyed. And notice Paul's own verb: Peter's withdrawal was "compelling the Gentiles to live like Jews" (2:14). A leader's public conduct teaches: if the first pope's example could compel the Church toward error, your conduct-versus-teaching distinction is a technicality. And nothing in Galatians suggests Paul thought Peter held a protected office. And history makes it worse: popes have been greedy, violent, and corrupt. An office that holy would not have holders that vile." Build it at full strength, then take it apart with tonight's texts.

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Its strength is real: Paul corrects Peter with zero deference to rank; Scripture nowhere paints Peter as above rebuke; and the historical record of certain popes is genuinely disgraceful, and Catholics who minimize it embarrass the truth. Concede every inch loudly. Add St. Cyprian's observation as a gift: Peter did not answer Paul by claiming his primacy; he yielded to truth. And add St. Catherine of Siena, who wrote to a pope with a frankness Paul would have admired, while calling him sweet Christ on earth. Fraternal correction of popes is not a Protestant discovery; it is a Catholic tradition with Doctors of the Church in it.

Now the press, in four moves. One: notice what the rebuke *assumes*. Paul confronts Peter publicly precisely because Peter's example was dragging everyone, "even Barnabas"; nobody stages a public correction of a nobody. The scene's very urgency testifies to Peter's unique gravity. Two: the claim your friend is attacking was never made. The Church has never taught that popes cannot sin, err in private opinion, fail in courage, or govern badly (CCC 1550 says the opposite in so many words). The claim is narrower: that no pope has ever bound the whole Church to error by definitive official act, and Antioch, as the anatomy showed, is not such an act; it is hypocrisy against Peter's own true ruling. Three: run your friend's own test on history. Take the worst popes, the ones Catholics wince at, and find the

definitive teaching act where one of them bound the Church to heresy. Twenty centuries, some genuinely terrible men, and Catholics contend that specific thing has never happened; the disputed cases, Honorius being the famous one, turn on exactly tonight's distinction between negligent conduct and definitive teaching. That record is either the longest coincidence in institutional history or a prayer at the Last Supper doing exactly what it said. Four: compulsion-by-example is exactly Paul's point, and exactly not a definition. Paul's alarm at Peter's gravitational pull is the passage's own strongest evidence of Peter's unique standing; and the Church's claim has always concerned definitive acts, not gravitational pull. The distinction is not a technicality; it is why Paul could fix the problem with a rebuke instead of a schism.

#### **DIG DEEPER · Why did Peter cave at Antioch?**

Paul names the engine: "fearing the circumcision party" (2:12). Fear of men is Peter's signature weakness in every failure: fear of the cross-shaped future at Caesarea Philippi, fear of a servant girl in the courtyard, fear of hardliners from Jerusalem at Antioch. The pattern matters pastorally: the office's first holder did not struggle with heresy or ambition; he struggled with human respect, the most ordinary temptation there is, the one everyone in this room fought this week. Christ knew that when he chose him, prayed for him anyway, and built on him anyway. There is no reading of that except mercy, and no excuse left for waiting until we are brave to be useful.

### **7.**

Turn it toward us, gently. The Church's honesty about Peter cost her something and bought her something. What does it do to your trust, in Scripture and in the Church, that the founding documents publish the founder's worst moments? And what does the whole pattern say to whoever in this room is carrying a public failure of their own?

#### **ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Let the group work. The landing on trust: legends launder their heroes; witnesses tell what happened. A church inventing its own authority does not record its first leader cursing and denying, getting called Satan, and being dressed down at Antioch. The embarrassment is the fingerprint of honesty, and honesty about the rock makes the claims about the rock more credible, not less.

And to the one carrying a failure: the entire arc of this study is that Christ's response to Peter's worst moments was correction, restoration, and recommissioning, never revocation. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" is not a consolation prize; it is the operating principle of the office and of every baptized life in this room. The Church is not embarrassed by restored failures. She is built on one.

## **SEND · TAKING IT WITH US**

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### **1.**

Fear of men was Peter's recurring fracture: the servant girl, the circumcision party. Where does human respect currently bend your conduct away from what you actually believe?

2.

Augustine says being corrected well is rarer and holier than correcting well. Who has standing to Nathan you, and when they last used it, did they meet David or a defense attorney?

## LIVE IT THIS WEEK

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1.

Pray Psalm 51, David's psalm after Nathan, once each day this week, as Peter's psalm and as yours.

2.

Identify one place your behavior contradicts your stated convictions, one act of practical hypocrisy, and correct the conduct, not the conviction, this week.

3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Lord, when Peter's successor is weak, send him a Paul and a Catherine, and give him David's heart to hear them."

### Closing Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, you looked at Peter across the courtyard and did not look away. Look at us the same way: through our denials, our hypocrisies, our fear of men, with the gaze that produces tears and not despair. Keep your Church honest about her failures and confident in your prayer, which cannot fail. Amen.*

**Scripture Memory Verse:** "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9, RSV2CE)

## PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Nine, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

### PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Build 1: rock to stumbling stone in five verses

### Luke 22:54-62

Build 2: the denials and the look

### Galatians 2:11-14

Builds 3-4: Antioch, read at full volume

**Acts 10:28, 34; 15:11**

Build 4: Peter's doctrine on the record

**2 Samuel 12:1-13**

Live discovery, Build 5: Nathan and David

**Isaiah 22:25**

Thread payoff: the steward's peg

**Numbers 20:10-12**

Leader background: Moses at Meribah

**Psalms 51**

Live It This Week, practice 1

**2 Corinthians 12:9**

Memory verse: power perfected in weakness

**CCC 1550; 890-891; 1429**

Catechism Connection

## SESSION TEN

# The Office Continues

2 Timothy 2:1-2; Titus 1:5; Acts 20:17-32

## PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Discovery Aim:** Participants discover that the apostles themselves built succession into the Church: Paul commanding four generations of transmission in a single verse, appointing and instructing others to appoint, and warning that oversight must outlast him. Then the earliest post-biblical voices testify: Clement of Rome governing beyond Rome while an apostle still lived, and Irenaeus reciting the Roman succession list as the ancient test of true teaching.

**Catholic Touchstone:** Apostolic succession. In order that the mission entrusted to them might continue after their death, the apostles left successors their own position of teaching authority (CCC 861-862): the Matthias principle of Session Seven, executed everywhere, and at Rome above all.

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Tonight the study crosses the bridge every honest inquirer must cross: from Peter to the popes. The New Testament supplies the principle and the pattern; the earliest Fathers supply the eyewitness confirmation; and the group should feel both halves land in sequence, Scripture first.

The principle was discovered in Session Seven: apostleship is an *episkopē*, an office, and offices get filled (Acts 1:20). Tonight watches the apostles act on it for the rest of their lives. 2 Timothy 2:2 is Scripture's tightest picture of transmission, four generations in nineteen Greek words: "what you have heard from me (one) before many witnesses entrust to faithful men (three) who will be able to teach others also (four)," with Timothy (two) as the relay. Paul is not writing a memoir; he is engineering transmission. Titus 1:5 shows the machinery installed: "appoint elders in every town as I directed you," appointment of appointers. Acts 20:28 names what the appointed hold: "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopoi*), to care for the church of God," shepherding vocabulary the group will recognize from the beach, now distributed to successors while Paul predicts wolves and his own departure in the same breath: succession exists because the apostles knew they would die and the flock would not.

Then the corroborating witnesses, and their dates are the argument. Clement of Rome, writing to Corinth around AD 96 (while, by strong ancient tradition, the apostle John still lived at Ephesus, far closer to Corinth than Rome is), states the succession design in plain prose: the apostles, knowing there would be strife over the episcopal office, appointed their first converts as bishops and deacons "and

afterwards gave the offices a permanent character; that is, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry." That is 1 Clement 42 and 44, one generation from the apostles, describing succession not as development but as the apostles' own arrangement.

And notice what the letter *is* before what it says: the church of Rome intervening with authority in the internal affairs of another apostolic church, demanding in strikingly authoritative terms that the unjust deposition be remedied and the instigators submit, and expecting obedience: those who disobey "the words spoken by him through us" will involve themselves "in transgression and in no small danger." Whether Corinth requested the intervention is unknown; what is remarkable either way is that Rome speaks this way, this early, at this distance, and no one anywhere records surprise. A few years later, Ignatius of Antioch addresses the Roman church with a deference he shows no other church, the church "which presides in love."

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Irenaeus of Lyons, around AD 180, makes succession the operational test of orthodoxy against the Gnostics: true doctrine is found where the succession from the apostles is public and traceable, and rather than list every church, he points to "the greatest and most ancient church, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul," recites her bishops name by name from Linus to his own day, and declares that with this church, on account of its preeminent authority, every church must agree. Whatever precise force *potentior principalitas* carries (the Latin translation of his lost Greek is famously debated, and honesty requires saying so), Irenaeus's method is undisputed: when he wants to show where apostolic teaching lives, he points at Rome's list.

Two honesty notes to give the group unprompted, because inoculation beats ambush. First: historians genuinely debate how quickly the one-bishop-per-city structure crystallized in Rome; some evidence suggests a college of presbyter-overseers led the earliest Roman church, with the single episcopate consolidating over the early second century. Catholics need not fear this: the succession Irenaeus recites is the succession of the church's authoritative teaching office, however its internal furniture was arranged in the first decades. Second: the exercise of Roman primacy visibly *developed*, from Clement's intervention to Leo to the medieval papacy to today, and development is not embarrassment. St. John Henry Newman made the point canonical: living ideas develop; the acorn and the oak are one organism, and the test is continuity of type. The seed texts of this study, the keys, the sheep, the strengthening, are the acorn; the question is whether the oak grew from it or beside it, and the earliest witnesses answer with names.

## OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

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**Numbers 27:15-23.** Moses, facing death, asks God for a successor "that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep which have no shepherd," and Joshua is invested by the laying on of hands before the priest and people. Succession by commissioning, with hands, in public: the pattern Paul repeats with Timothy (2 Timothy 1:6).

**Isaiah 22:20-22.** The steward's office passing from Shebna to Eliakim, robe and key transferred: the study's oldest evidence that this particular office is the hand-me-down kind. Session Three banked it; tonight spends it.

**Exodus 29:29-30.** Aaron's sacred vestments "shall be his sons' after him," worn by successor after successor for anointing and ordination: Israel's priesthood was constituted for transmission from its first day. Offices that matter are offices that outlive their holders; that is what the vestments mean.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Clement of Rome** *Letter to the Corinthians, 42 and 44*

Writing about AD 96, Clement testifies that the apostles, foreknowing contention over the bishop's office, appointed the men named above and afterward provided that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. Succession, in the mouth of a man who knew the apostles, is not a later theory; it is their own recorded arrangement for the Church's continuance.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Irenaeus of Lyons** *Against Heresies, Book III, 3*

Against teachers claiming secret apostolic traditions, Irenaeus answers with a public list: the church founded at Rome by Peter and Paul, whose bishops he names in order down to his own day, and with which, on account of its preeminent authority, every church must agree. For Irenaeus the succession is the argument: truth is where the handing-on can be shown, name by name, back to the apostles.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. John Henry Newman** *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*

Newman, whose study of the Fathers carried him into the Catholic Church, argued that living ideas necessarily develop, and that a doctrine's later fullness can be the same organism as its scriptural seed, the oak of the acorn, provided the type is continuous. His famous verdict stands over tonight's evidence: to be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant.

## CATECHISM CONNECTION

**CCC 861-862** is tonight's thesis in the Church's own words: in order that the mission entrusted to them might be continued after their death, the apostles left bishops as successors, handing over their own position of teaching authority, and what the Lord granted the apostles endures in that succession.

**CCC 77** joins succession to Tradition itself: the apostolic preaching is preserved by a continuous line of succession until the end of time, which is why Tradition and succession are one doctrine seen from two sides.

**CCC 1590 and 1594** locate the fullness of the sacrament of orders in the bishop, successor of the apostles, so that the office watched tonight in Timothy and Titus is the same office your diocese has now.

## THREAD WATCH

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**The Office thread resolves tonight.** From *episkopē* in Acts 1:20 through Isaiah's transferred key to Clement's "other approved men should succeed," the thread completes. Recite its stations with the group at the end; they have earned the panorama.

**The Rome question opens and half-closes.** Tonight establishes that succession is apostolic, and shows that the earliest surviving witnesses (Clement, Ignatius, Irenaeus) already treat Rome's succession as carrying distinctive weight. Why Rome, the martyrdom that planted the see, is next session's story; if the group asks why that city, smile and say: because of where the following led. Say no more.

**The Revealed Confession thread holds for the finale.** Clement and Irenaeus show the office continuing; what protection travels with it is Session Twelve. Two sessions remain; keep the powder dry.

## SESSION GOALS

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### 1.

Discover the four-generation relay of 2 Timothy 2:2 live and the appointment machinery of Titus 1:5 and Acts 20:28.

### 2.

Hear Clement of Rome on his own terms: the succession design stated one generation out, and the letter's authoritative behavior toward Corinth weighed honestly.

### 3.

Walk Irenaeus's method: succession lists as the public test of orthodoxy, with Rome's list as his chief exhibit, debates about his Latin honestly flagged.

### 4.

Name development without fear, using Newman: acorn and oak, continuity of type, and the honesty notes about early Roman church structure given unprompted.

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## TIME NOTE

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75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, compress Build 2 (Titus and Acts 20 can merge) and trim the Dig Deeper. Protect Build 4, Clement, and Build 6, the steelman; the bridge from Peter to the popes is built in those two.

## PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Opening Prayer:

*Father, you are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: the God of handed-on promises. Thank you for every link in the chain that carried the faith from an upper room to this one. Make us faithful men and women, able to teach others also, and keep your Church's succession holy to the end of the age. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

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1.

What is something in your possession that came down to you through multiple generations, an object, a recipe, a trade, a prayer? How many hands can you actually name?

2.

When a beloved founder leaves an organization, what determines whether the thing survives ten years later? What has to have been built?

### BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

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1.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Read 2 Timothy 2:1-2 aloud, and then do the arithmetic out loud: how many distinct generations of teachers appear in verse 2? Walk the relay hand by hand. What is Paul, in prison and facing death, actually constructing with this sentence?

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Four generations in one verse: Paul ("what you have heard from me"), Timothy (the you), "faithful men" (entrust to), "others also" (who will teach). And the deposit travels with witnesses attached, "before many witnesses": public teaching, publicly handed on, nothing esoteric.

Paul is writing his last letter, and he spends it engineering transmission: not a memoir but a relay. Notice the verb, *entrust*, the language of a deposit placed in keeping, the same image as "guard the deposit" (2 Timothy 1:14). The apostle's plan for the post-apostolic Church is not "the writings will manage"; it is faithful men, able to teach, all the way down: a public relay of the deposit which, joined to the appointments of Titus 1:5 and the overseers of Acts 20:28, is the pattern the Church names apostolic succession, and has been running for twenty centuries.

## 2.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Now the machinery. Read Titus 1:5, then Acts 20:28-31, Paul's farewell at Miletus. In Titus, what is Titus commanded to do, and what does that make him? In Acts 20, what does Paul say the Holy Spirit has made the Ephesian elders, what verb are they given, and what does Paul predict is coming?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Titus is left in Crete precisely to "appoint elders in every town as I directed you": an appointer of officers, appointed to appoint, succession machinery installed on an island Paul may never revisit. And at Miletus, Paul tells the elders "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers," *episkopoi*, the Acts 1:20 word, "to care for the church of God": shepherd vocabulary, the beach commission distributed to successors.

And the timing tells the why: Paul predicts in the same breath that "fierce wolves will come in among you" after his departure, men "speaking perverse things." Succession is not institutional vanity; it is what love builds when it knows it is going to die and the wolves are not. The apostles installed overseers *because* they foresaw both their absence and the heresies, exactly the situation the second century delivered.

## 3.

Callback question, and let the group assemble it: put tonight's texts next to Acts 1:20 ("his office let another take"), Isaiah 22 (the key transferred from Shebna to Eliakim), and even Exodus 29:29 (Aaron's vestments passing to his sons). What kind of thing, across all of Scripture, is a God-given office?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

The hand-me-down kind. Aaron's vestments were sewn for successors; the steward's key moved from shoulder to shoulder; Moses laid hands on Joshua so the flock would not be shepherdless; Judas's

*episkopē* was filled within weeks; and Paul spent his last letters wiring the relay. Across every office this study has examined (priest, steward, shepherd of the congregation, the apostolic *episkopē* itself), Scripture's consistent pattern is transmission: these

offices were built to outlive their first holders.

So the burden of proof quietly flips, and let the group feel it flip: the strange claim would be that the office built on the rock, holding the steward's keys, uniquely among all of Scripture's offices, was designed to evaporate at its holder's death, on a cross, with the flock still very much alive. Nothing in the pattern supports that; everything opposes it. Now we go see what the men one generation out actually did.

## 4.

Meet St. Clement of Rome, writing to Corinth about AD 96: the Voices box has his succession passage, so have someone read that callout aloud. Two questions: what does Clement say the apostles themselves arranged, and, before the content, what is this letter *doing*, who is writing to whom, about what, with what expectation? One more fact for the scales: by strong ancient tradition, where was the apostle John living, and still alive, when this letter was sent?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

The content: the apostles, foreseeing strife over the bishop's office, appointed their first converts and "afterwards gave the offices a permanent character," providing that when these died, "other approved men should succeed to their ministry" (1 Clement 44). One generation from the apostles, a man the ancients say knew Peter describes succession as the apostles' own design, not a later development.

The behavior: the church of Rome is intervening, unrequested or not we cannot prove, in the internal governance of another apostolic church, demanding in strikingly authoritative terms that the unjust deposition be remedied and the instigators submit, and warning that disobedience to "the words spoken by him through us" brings "no small danger." And it does this while John, by strong tradition, still lived at Ephesus, a far shorter journey from Corinth than Rome is. We have no record that Corinth appealed to John, near as he was; what survives is Rome writing to them, with authority, and antiquity records no one anywhere finding it strange. Within a decade, Ignatius of Antioch addresses Rome as the church "which presides in love," a deference he pays no one else. The earliest surviving data records no protest and no surprise at Rome speaking this way, an absence that fits a church already accustomed to Rome's role far better than a church watching a new authority being invented. Catholics read this early behavior as evidence of Roman primacy; others read it as fraternal admonition; but the behavior itself is on the record, and remarkably early.

**5.**

Now Irenaeus, about AD 180, fighting Gnostics who claimed secret apostolic traditions. His weapon is in the Voices box; read it aloud. What is his method for locating true doctrine, which church does he choose as his chief exhibit and why, and what does he do that no Gnostic could imitate?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

His method is public succession: true teaching is found where the handing-on from the apostles can be shown openly, church by church, bishop by bishop. His chief exhibit is "the greatest and most ancient church, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul," with which, "on account of its preeminent authority, every church must agree." And then he does the thing no secret tradition can counterfeit: he recites the list, Linus, Anacletus, Clement, name by name, twelve bishops down to his own day.

One honesty flag, offered before anyone demands it: Irenaeus's Greek for this passage is lost, and scholars genuinely debate the precise force of the Latin *potentior principalitas*, preeminent authority or more powerful origin. But no debate touches his method or his exhibit: when the second century's greatest theologian wanted to show where apostolic teaching lived, he pointed at Rome and counted. The succession list was the ancient Church's proof of orthodoxy, and Rome's was the list he chose.

**6.**

Full steelman. Your friend, who has done some reading, says: "Here is what your sources skip. Clement never calls himself pope, or even names himself; the letter is from the church of Rome, not a monarch, and it may be nothing more than one church's fraternal admonition to another, the kind Corinth itself might have sent. Ignatius's "presides in love" may describe Rome's eminence in charity, not jurisdiction. Irenaeus may point to Rome simply as the most convenient and prestigious sample of public apostolic

teaching, not as a tribunal every church must obey. Historians say the earliest Roman church may have been led by a council of presbyters, with the single bishop emerging only in the second century. The papacy as you know it developed over centuries. You are reading the oak back into the acorn." Give it full strength, then answer, and use Newman.

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Grant everything true in it, because it is considerable: Clement writes anonymously in his church's name; the one-bishop structure in Rome plausibly crystallized over the early second century, and honest Catholic historians say so; and the exercise of primacy visibly developed, from Clement's letter to Leo confronting Attila to the medieval papacy to a pope on an airplane. A Catholic who denies development has not read the Fathers; the ones who read them deepest, like Newman, converted because of them.

Now the answer, in Newman's own frame. Development is what living ideas do; the question is never whether the oak differs from the acorn but whether it grew from it, continuity of type. So run the test on tonight's data: the seed texts give a singular rock, keys, a universal shepherd, a strengthener of brethren; the first-generation evidence shows Rome teaching succession as apostolic design and exercising authority beyond her borders while an apostle lived; the second-century evidence shows Rome's succession as the standard list and her agreement as the standard test. That is one organism at three ages, not a medieval graft. And take the added readings one by one: fraternal admonition sits oddly with a letter that warns of "no small danger" for those who disobey (1 Clement 59); "presides in love" may name a charity, but it remains a deference Ignatius pays no other church; and Irenaeus's own words are that every church must agree with Rome, whatever the precise force of his Latin. And notice the alternative your friend must defend: that the office Christ conspicuously founded vanished silently, and that a counterfeit Roman authority arose so early, so universally, and so unprotested that our very first documents already assume it. The development hypothesis has a seed, a stem, and witnesses. The invention hypothesis must explain why our very first surviving documents already show Rome acting, and being addressed, this way, with no recorded protest anywhere. To be deep in history, Newman concluded, is to cease to be a Protestant; he staked his life on that sentence, and tonight's sources are why.

**DIG DEEPER · Hands, all the way back**

Paul reminds Timothy "to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6), the same gesture by which Moses invested Joshua (Numbers 27:23) and the apostles commissioned the Seven (Acts 6:6). Succession in the Catholic Church is not a filing system; it is a physical chain of hands on heads, ordination by ordination, from your own bishop backward through the centuries into that room. When a new bishop is consecrated in your diocese, the hands on his head continue a gesture that has never once been interrupted since hands rested on Timothy. The apostles are, in that precise sense, still appointing.

**7.**

Close the loop for the study: we now have the office founded (Sessions 1-6), exercised (7-8), surviving failure (9), and transmitted (tonight). Two questions remain, and they set our last two sessions. First: of

all cities, why did Peter's succession run through *Rome*? Second: what exactly travels down the line with the office, what is protected, and what is not? Tonight, just name why each question matters.

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

The Rome question matters because nothing in Matthew 16 mentions Italy: the keys attach to Peter, so the see is wherever Peter's ministry and succession landed, and the answer is a story with a road, a prison, and a hill in it, next week's story. If Peter never came to Rome at all, the succession list loses its anchor, which is why next session takes the historical question seriously; and since the ancient testimony that he ministered and died there is early, unanimous, and unrivaled, every path in this study converges on one city. (The succession rests on Peter's Roman ministry and martyrdom, not on the archaeology of any particular relics.)

And the protection question matters because everything tonight transmitted would be worthless if the deposit could be corrupted in transit: a perfect relay carrying a corruptible package saves no one. What Christ's prayer and the Father's revelation actually guarantee in Peter's successors, its exact shape, its severe limits, and what it has never meant, is the study's final session, and by then the group will have earned the definition the hard way: from the texts up.

**SEND · TAKING IT WITH US**

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1.

You are generation four of 2 Timothy 2:2, someone entrusted the faith to you. Who is your generation five, the person you are deliberately entrusting it to? If no name comes, what does that ask of you?

2.

The deposit traveled to you through faithful hands, some of them wounded, all of them mortal. What would it mean this month to treat the faith you received as a trust to guard rather than a preference you hold?

**LIVE IT THIS WEEK**

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1.

Build your own succession list this week: name, on paper, the actual chain of people who carried the faith to you, as far back as you can trace, and thank God for each by name.

2.

Look up your diocese's line of bishops (most diocesan websites list it) and pray for your current bishop by name each day this week: he is Acts 20:28 in your zip code.

3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Lord of the relay, let the deposit pass through our generation undiminished."

### Closing Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, you entrusted your Gospel to men who would die, and built a Church that would not. Thank you for Timothy and Titus, for Clement and Irenaeus, for every unnamed hand in the chain that reached us. Make us worthy links. What we have received, let us hand on, whole. Amen.*

**Scripture Memory Verse:** "And what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:2, RSV2CE)

## PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Ten, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

### PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Live discovery, Build 1: four generations in one verse

#### Titus 1:5

Live discovery, Build 2: appointed to appoint

#### Acts 20:17-32

Live discovery, Build 2: overseers, wolves, departure

#### Acts 1:20; Isaiah 22:20-22; Exodus 29:29-30; Numbers 27:15-23

Build 3: offices are the hand-me-down kind

#### 2 Timothy 1:6, 14

Build 1 and Dig Deeper: the deposit and the hands

#### 1 Clement 42, 44, 59

Build 4: succession stated, authority exercised (Voices box)

#### Against Heresies III.3

Build 5: the Roman list as the test (Voices box)

#### Acts 6:6

Dig Deeper: hands on the Seven

**CCC 861-862; 77; 1590; 1594**

Catechism Connection

## SESSION ELEVEN

# Peter in Babylon

*1 Peter 5:1-14; John 21:18-19; Revelation 17*

## PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Discovery Aim:** Participants discover where Peter's "follow me" ended: writing from "Babylon," the early Church's code for Rome, shepherding to the last, and finally stretching out his hands under Nero as Jesus foretold. They weigh the evidence for Peter in Rome, the unanimous early testimony, the coded greeting, the tomb no other city ever claimed, and see why the steward's succession runs through that see: the keys stayed where the keybearer fell.

**Catholic Touchstone:** The see of Peter. Rome's primacy is not geographic vanity but a martyr's estate: the church "which presides in charity" (St. Ignatius, quoted in CCC 834) is the church where the shepherd of the whole flock followed his Lord all the way (CCC 834; 882; 936).

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Tonight is a detective story, and the group has the clues in hand from their reading. The question sounds simple, was Peter in Rome and did he die there?, but a great deal stands on it: Session Ten showed succession running through Rome's list, and if Peter never sat where the list begins, the list is a genealogy of a ghost. So the evidence must be weighed honestly, and it can be, because it is remarkably strong.

Clue one, the coded greeting: "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark" (1 Peter 5:13). "She" is the church where Peter writes; the question is where "Babylon" is. Mesopotamian Babylon in Peter's day was a much-diminished place with no tradition, ancient or modern, connecting Peter to it; the same is true of the Egyptian fortress-town of the same name. But "Babylon" as a code for Rome, the new world-empire that would soon destroy the Temple as the old Babylon had, is the standing cipher of the era: Revelation uses it repeatedly for the city on seven mountains "which has dominion over the kings of the earth" (Revelation 17:9, 18), and Jewish writings of the period do the same. Nearly the whole ancient Church, and most scholars across confessional lines today, read 1 Peter 5:13 as Rome. Present it as the overwhelmingly probable reading, hedged exactly that much.

Clue two, the prophecy: "when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go. (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.)"

(John 21:18-19). John records the prophecy and its meaning, writing decades after the fact, for readers who evidently already knew how Peter died: stretched-out hands, girded by another, glorifying God by death. John is not predicting; he is confirming what his churches knew.

Clue three, the unbroken early testimony, and the dates matter more than the details. Clement of Rome, about AD 96, writing in the city itself, recalls Peter and Paul's martyrdoms "in our own generation" and immediately joins to them a great multitude of martyrs whose example was "among us" (1 Clement 5-6). He never names the place outright, but a Roman writer joining the apostles' deaths to Rome's own martyrs, within living memory, is the earliest witness that they died where he writes. Ignatius of Antioch, about 107, writes to the Romans "I do not command you as Peter and Paul did," assuming they had commanded that church in particular. Irenaeus, about 180, calls Rome the church "founded and organized by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul." Around 200, the Roman presbyter Gaius (in a fragment preserved by Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 2.25) offers to point visitors to the "trophies" (the monuments) of the apostles on the Vatican hill and the Ostian Way, and Bishop Dionysius of Corinth writes of Peter and Paul teaching in Italy and being martyred "at the same time." St.

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Jerome later gathers the tradition: Peter, head of the church at Rome, crucified under Nero, head-downward at his own request, counting himself unworthy to die as his Lord. Hold the head-downward detail with an honest "the tradition adds"; hold the Roman martyrdom itself with confidence, because antiquity is unanimous.

Clue four, the argument from silence, and it is louder than the documents: no other city, in any surviving ancient source, ever claimed Peter's tomb. In a Christian world that contested relics ferociously, where cities were made by possessing an apostle, Antioch, where Peter demonstrably ministered, never claimed his grave; Jerusalem never did; Alexandria, Ephesus, no one. One city claimed it, from the beginning, and built successively grander shrines over one spot on a Vatican hillside to say so. Unopposed claims of this kind, in that world, are how you find real graves.

Clue five, the bones, handled with exactly the Church's own care: twentieth-century excavations under St. Peter's high altar uncovered a first-century pagan and Christian necropolis, a mid-second-century shrine (matching Gaius's "trophy") built over a simple earlier grave, surrounded by Christian graffiti invoking Peter, and human remains that Pope St. Paul VI announced in 1968 had been identified "in a way that we can consider convincing." Say it the way the Church says it: not laboratory certainty, but a simple early grave over which a shrine was raised by the mid-second century, veneration at that spot demonstrable within about a century of Peter's death, on the spot the basilica's altar has marked for seventeen hundred years. The altar was not placed over the bones by luck; the basilica was built, at absurd engineering cost on a hillside, to put the altar over that grave.

Why it matters doctrinally, said precisely: primacy attaches to Peter and his succession, not to Italian soil; Rome is the see of Peter because Peter's ministry and martyrdom planted his *cathedra* there, sealed in blood, exactly as "follow me" promised. And do not miss the letter itself: 1 Peter 5:1-11, written from that Babylon in Peter's final years, is the shepherd of Session Six still tending: elders exhorted to shepherd willingly, the flock entrusted to the chief Shepherd, and Peter's promise using the very verb of Luke 22:32: God "will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you" (5:10). The strengthener of the brethren, strengthening to the last line.

## OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

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**Psalms 137:1 and Jeremiah 50-51.** Babylon as the archetype of the proud world-empire that exiles God's people: the name was ready-made as a cipher for Rome, the empire that would burn the second Temple as Babylon burned the first. When Peter and John write "Babylon," they are praying Israel's oldest political theology.

**Daniel 4:30.** "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built?" The king's boast names the city's essence: human glory enthroned. Peter dies at the hands of exactly that spirit wearing Roman dress, and his letter from Babylon tells the exiles how to live holy inside it (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11).

**Genesis 11:1-9.** Babel, where the nations scattered in pride, is where the name begins. The Church's memory loved the reversal: at Babel tongues divided mankind; at Pentecost tongues gathered it; and in new Babylon the fisherman's grave became a gathering-place for every nation on earth.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Ignatius of Antioch** *Letter to the Romans, 4*

On the road to his own martyrdom about AD 107, Ignatius begs the Roman church not to interfere with his coming death, and drops the sentence historians treasure: I do not command you as Peter and Paul did; they were apostles, I am a convict. Writing to Rome alone does Ignatius speak this way, assuming as common knowledge that Peter and Paul had taught and commanded in that church.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Irenaeus of Lyons** *Against Heresies, Book III, 1*

Irenaeus states the founding as settled fact: while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome and laying the foundations of the church, Matthew issued his Gospel, and after their departure Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, handed down Peter's preaching in writing. For Irenaeus, Rome's apostolic foundation by the two chief apostles is the fixed point from which his whole succession argument runs.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Jerome** *On Illustrious Men, 1*

Jerome opens his catalogue of Christian writers with Peter: prince of the apostles, who governed the church at Rome until the last year of Nero, when he was crucified, and, the tradition Jerome records, fastened head-downward at his own request, declaring himself unworthy to be crucified as his Lord was. The steward's final act, in the Church's memory, was one more deferral to the King.

## CATECHISM CONNECTION

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**CCC 834 joins two patristic voices: St. Ignatius, who calls Rome the church "which presides in charity," and St. Irenaeus, who adds that with this church, by reason of its preeminent origin, the whole Church must be in agreement.**

**CCC 882** names the present tense of tonight's history: the pope, bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful.

**CCC 936** compresses the study so far into one line: the Lord made St. Peter the visible foundation of his Church and entrusted the keys to him; the bishop of the church of Rome, successor to St. Peter, is head of the college of bishops.

## THREAD WATCH

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**The Follow Me thread resolves tonight.** Planted at the end of Session Six, it lands at the Vatican hillside. Read John 21:18-19 again at the summit and let the room be quiet; the prophecy and the grave are the same fact seen from both ends.

**The Rome question closes.** Session Ten asked why the succession runs through Rome; tonight answers: because that is where the keybearer's following ended and his chair remained. If the group connects Isaiah 22's "throne of honor" to the word *cathedra*, celebrate them.

**One session remains.** The office founded, exercised, failed-and-restored, transmitted, and located; all that is left is its exact protection and its true style. Tell the group plainly: bring every remaining objection next week, especially the word infallibility. The last session exists for it.

## SESSION GOALS

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**1.**

Crack the Babylon code from Revelation's own clues, with the honest hedge stated and then weighed.

**2.**

Assemble the early testimony chronologically, Clement to Jerome, and feel the force of unanimity plus the silence of every rival city.

**3.**

Handle the excavations with the Church's own careful language: a venerated first-century grave under the altar, announced as convincing, not oversold.

**4.**

Read 1 Peter 5 as the shepherd's last letter, and catch the Luke 22:32 verb in 5:10 with their own eyes.

## TIME NOTE

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75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, compress Build 6, the excavations, into the leader's summary and trim the Dig Deeper. Protect Build 2, the Babylon discovery, and Build 7, the 1 Peter 5 reading; the night should end on the letter, not the forensics.

## PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Opening Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, you told your friend how his following would end, and he followed anyway. Give us tonight the sober joy of the martyrs' Church: eyes open, price counted, love undeterred. And when our own following costs us, gird us and carry us where, on our own, we would not wish to go. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

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1.

Where would you want to be buried, or what place on earth would you want your life associated with forever, and why that place?

2.

What is the strongest claim you believe on testimony alone, no photograph, no document you have personally verified? What makes testimony trustworthy to you?

### BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

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1.

Open the case. Read 1 Peter 5:13: "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings." "She" is the church where Peter is writing. So the whole question is on the map: where is Babylon? Before any clues: what are the candidate readings, honestly listed?

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Three candidates deserve the table: the literal Mesopotamian Babylon; a Roman fortress-town in Egypt also called Babylon; or a code name for some other city. Honesty first: the literal reading has a real case. Mesopotamia held one of the largest Jewish populations in the world, a natural mission field for the apostle to the circumcised; every other place-name in the letter (Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, 1:1) is literal; and serious interpreters, John Calvin among them, have defended taking this one literally too.

But the literal candidates have a shared problem: silence. Old Babylon in Peter's day was greatly diminished, and no tradition anywhere, in any century, in any church, east or west, connects Peter's ministry or death to either Babylon. Traditions attach to real footsteps; apostles leave churches, tombs, and memories where they actually go. Both literal Babylons have none. So we go looking for the code,

and Peter's own circle wrote the codebook.

## 2.

LIVE DISCOVERY. You read the codebook this week. Someone read Revelation 17:5, 9, and 18 aloud. Revelation, from the Johannine circle, names a "Babylon the great." What two identifying features does chapter 17 give her, and what city in the first century do they fit?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Feature one: "the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated" (17:9). Feature two: she "is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth" (17:18). A city on seven hills that rules the kings of the earth: in the first century that is an address, and every ancient reader knew whose. Rome celebrated her own seven hills on coins and in festivals.

"Babylon" as code for Rome was the standing cipher of the age, in Revelation repeatedly and in Jewish writings after the Temple's destruction, for the same reason the code worked instantly: Rome was doing to the second Temple what Babylon did to the first, the proud world-empire of Daniel 4 in new dress. So when Peter greets from "she who is at Babylon," the overwhelmingly probable reading, held by nearly all ancient and most modern interpreters across confessions, is: the church at Rome sends greetings. Hedged exactly that much, and no more.

## 3.

Reread John 21:18-19, the prophecy from the beach: stretched-out hands, girded by another, carried where he does not wish, "to show by what death he was to glorify God." John writes this decades after Peter's death, for his churches. What does that timing tell us about what John's first readers already knew?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

John is not making a prediction his readers must wait to verify; he is recording a prophecy whose fulfillment they evidently knew, which is why he can add the interpretive gloss "by what death." You explain a prophecy's meaning to readers who know the ending. Stretched-out hands girded by another was read from the earliest centuries as crucifixion described from inside; John himself says only "by what death," but the unanimous tradition supplies the cross, and John's churches, hearing it, evidently needed no more.

So by the 90s, the manner of Peter's death was common Christian knowledge, needing only allusion. The question the rest of tonight answers is the where, and the witnesses line up in order, starting with a man writing from the city itself.

## 4.

Now the testimony, in chronological order, and the dates are the argument. The leader will read the chain: Clement of Rome (about 96), Ignatius (about 107, in tonight's Voices), Irenaeus (about 180, in the Voices), the Roman presbyter Gaius (about 200), Dionysius of Corinth (about 170). What does each add, and what is the cumulative force?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Clement, writing from Rome itself within living memory, recalls Peter and Paul's martyrdoms "in our own generation" alongside a great multitude of local martyrs; he does not name the place, but the joining is a hometown witness, thirty years out. Ignatius, a decade later, tells the Romans "I do not command you as Peter and Paul did," assuming those two had commanded that particular church. Dionysius of Corinth writes of Peter and Paul teaching in Italy and dying "at the same time." Irenaeus states Rome's founding by Peter and Paul as settled fact and builds his whole succession argument on it. And Gaius, a Roman cleric (in a fragment preserved by Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 2.25), offers to physically walk visitors to the apostles' "trophies," their grave monuments, on the Vatican hill and the Ostian Way: by 200, Peter's tomb is a place you can be shown.

Cumulative force: unanimous, early, geographically distributed (Rome, Antioch, Corinth, Gaul), and utterly uncontested. No surviving ancient source disputes it; antiquity, which argued about everything, has left us no argument about this. St. Jerome later gathers the tradition whole: crucified under Nero, and, the tradition adds, head-downward at his own request, counting himself unworthy of his Lord's exact death, the steward deferring to the King one last time.

**5.**

Now the argument from silence, and let the group construct it: in the ancient Church, possessing an apostle's tomb made a city. Relics were contested ferociously. Antioch could document Peter's ministry from Galatians itself; Jerusalem held the Church's first years. So the question: which cities, besides Rome, ever claimed Peter's grave, and what does the answer prove?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

None that any surviving source records. Antioch, with a documented Petrine ministry and every motive, left us no claim to his grave; neither did Jerusalem, Alexandria, Ephesus, or either Babylon. One city claimed it, from the beginning, and kept building over one specific spot on a hillside to say so.

In a world of contested relics, an unopposed claim of the most valuable relic in Christendom is how you find a real grave. False claims attract rivals; this one attracted a basilica. The silence of every other city is the loudest witness in the case.

**6.**

The forensics, held with exactly the Church's own care. The leader summarizes the twentieth-century excavations under St. Peter's high altar. What was found, what did Pope St. Paul VI actually announce in 1968, and what may we responsibly conclude?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Beneath the altar, excavators found a first-century necropolis; within it, a simple earth grave over which a small shrine was built in the mid-second century, matching Gaius's "trophy" almost too well; around it, Christian graffiti invoking Peter's name; and remains, kept wrapped in the monument, of an older man of the first century. Paul VI announced the relics had been identified "in a way that we can consider convincing": the Church's own carefully hedged sentence, and we should not say more than she does.

What we may responsibly conclude: the basilica was not built and the altar not placed by legend-drift or luck. Constantine's engineers cut into a hillside and buried a functioning cemetery, at enormous cost and against every convenience, to center the altar on one pre-existing venerated grave. Seventeen centuries later, excavation found beneath the altar the second-century shrine and the simple earlier grave it honored, the very spot the Roman church had marked as Peter's from at least the mid-second century. The identifications of the graffiti and the bones remain debated among scholars; the Church herself claims no more than "convincing." The X on the map was placed by a community certain of what it guarded, and it built a basilica to say so.

## 7.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Now leave the forensics and read the letter. Read 1 Peter 5:1-4 and 5:10-11 aloud: the shepherd of Session Six, writing from Babylon near the end. What is he still doing, near the end of his life? And look hard at the verbs of verse 10, one of them should ring a bell from Session Five.

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

He is still shepherding: exhorting the elders "as a fellow elder," not domineering, to "tend the flock of God that is your charge... willingly... eagerly," with the chief Shepherd's crown in view. The man given "feed my sheep" on a beach is feeding sheep in his final paragraphs, from the capital of the empire that will kill him, and he grabs no titles doing it: fellow elder, witness, servant.

And verse 10: "the God of all grace... will himself restore, establish, and *strengthen* you." There is the verb of Luke 22:32, the commission verb, "strengthen your brethren," in Peter's own blessing. He is doing, in his final sentences, precisely what the Lord assigned him at the table: turned again long ago, strengthening to the last line. The commission and the man's whole life have become the same thing.

### DIG DEEPER · Quo vadis?

An ancient story, preserved in the apocryphal Acts of Peter and beloved by the Church without being asserted as history, tells that Peter, persuaded to flee Nero's persecution, met Christ on the Appian Way walking toward the city. Domine, quo vadis, Lord, where are you going? I am going to Rome to be crucified again. And Peter turned around. Hold it as the early Church held it: not a document, but a parable the community told about a truth it knew from documents, that Peter's courage failed once by a fire and did not fail at the end. The man who once fled a servant girl walked back into Nero's Rome.

## 8.

Close the case and open the meaning. Assemble tonight's verdict in one or two sentences, and then answer the deeper question: why does it *matter* that the succession runs through a martyr's grave rather than a conference decision, and what does it say about the kind of authority this office was always meant to be?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

The verdict: by coded greeting, fulfilled prophecy, unanimous early testimony, the silence of every rival city, and a venerated first-century grave under the high altar, Peter ministered and was martyred at Rome, and his chair remained where he fell. Rome's primacy is Peter's primacy with an address: the

keys stayed where the keybearer laid them down.

The meaning: the see was purchased the way the flock was, with blood. The office's title deed is not a legal instrument but a crucifixion, which permanently defines the authority's character: the steward rules from a grave he accepted, under a King who died first. "Presiding in charity," Ignatius called that church, and charity there meant what it meant on Calvary. One question remains for this study: what, exactly, travels down that blood-bought line, what is protected, what is not, and what is it all for? Bring your sharpest objections. Next week we finish.

## SEND · TAKING IT WITH US

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### 1.

"Another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go." Peter's freedom was to consent. Where in your life right now are you being carried somewhere you did not choose, and what would Peter's consent look like there?

### 2.

Peter signed this letter from Babylon "fellow elder" and spent it strengthening others. If your last recorded words to the people you love were written this month, what would they be strengthening?

## LIVE IT THIS WEEK

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### 1.

Read all of 1 Peter this week, one sitting if you can, hearing it as a late letter of the man this study has followed: from Babylon, near the end, still feeding sheep.

### 2.

Take a virtual walk through the Vatican necropolis this week (the Scavi; the Vatican posts a tour online) and pray at the trophy of Gaius from your chair: a first-century grave, still gathering the nations.

### 3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Lord, you led Peter where he did not wish to go; give his successor a martyr's freedom, and your whole Church a martyr's love."

### Closing Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, chief Shepherd, you told him how it would end, and he followed you all the way to the hill. Thank you for a Church founded on witnesses who paid, and for a chair bought with blood. When our following grows costly, walk toward us on the road as you walked toward him, and turn us around. Amen.*

**Scripture Memory Verse:** "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you." (1 Peter 5:10, RSV2CE)

## PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Eleven, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

### PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Build 1: the coded greeting from Babylon

**Revelation 17:5, 9, 18**

Live discovery, Build 2: seven mountains, dominion over kings

**John 21:18-19**

Build 3: the prophecy and its knowing readers

**1 Clement 5-6**

Build 4: hometown witness, within living memory

**Letter to the Romans 4 (Ignatius)**

Build 4 and Voices: as Peter and Paul commanded you

**Against Heresies III.1**

Build 4 and Voices: founded by Peter and Paul

**1 Peter 5:1-11**

Live discovery, Build 7: the shepherd's last letter, the strengthening verb

**Psalms 137:1; Daniel 4:30; Genesis 11:1-9**

Leader background: Babylon's theology

**CCC 834; 882; 936**

Catechism Connection

## SESSION TWELVE

# Servant of the Servants

*Matthew 16:17; Luke 22:26-32; John 13:12-15; John 21:15-17*

## PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Discovery Aim:** Participants assemble the whole study into its finished shape: the four pillar texts read as one harmony, the charism of infallibility defined exactly as the Church defines it, narrowly, with its long list of what it is not, and the office's true style fixed forever by a towel. The study ends as a Send: twelve people commissioned as strengtheners of the brethren.

**Catholic Touchstone:** The papacy as gift for unity. The pope is *servus servorum Dei*, servant of the servants of God: an office whose protection is precise, whose power is bounded by the deposit it serves, and whose whole purpose is that the flock be one and the faith be findable (CCC 882; 890-891).

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Tonight has three movements: harmony, precision, and commissioning. The harmony gathers the four pillars into one picture; the precision defines infallibility exactly, which mostly means listing what it is not; and the commissioning turns the study's last Send outward. Participants were told to bring their strongest remaining objection; budget real time for those, and trust the study: after eleven sessions, the group can answer most of them for each other, which is itself the point.

The harmony: read the four pillars as one act in four scenes. Caesarea Philippi gives the constitution: revealed confession, rock, keys (Matthew 16). The Last Supper gives the guarantee and the style: Christ's prayer for a faith that will not fail, and greatness redefined as service (Luke 22). The beach gives the pastoral office and its sole qualification: love, three times, and the flock that remains Christ's own (John 21). Jerusalem gives the office in operation: the steward's decisive testimony settling the doctrinal question within the college, and the council's decree sealed by the Spirit (Acts 15:28). Foundation, guarantee, care, operation: one office, whole.

The precision, and here exactness is charity. When the First Vatican Council defined papal infallibility in 1870 (Pastor Aeternus), it defined something far narrower than friend and foe usually imagine. The conditions: the pope teaches *ex cathedra*, that is, (1) exercising his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, not as private theologian, diplomat, or dinner guest; (2) on a matter of faith or morals; (3) definitively binding the whole Church. Under those conditions, and, for this solemn papal act, only those, the Church holds that he is preserved from error, by the divine assistance promised to Peter,

possessing the infallibility with which Christ willed his whole Church to be endowed (CCC 891). (The Church also teaches infallibly through the ordinary and universal Magisterium of the bishops in communion with the pope, CCC 891; tonight's focus is the solemn papal exercise.) The seed texts are the ones this group found with their own hands: a confession the Father, not flesh and blood, revealed (Matthew 16:17), and a faith Christ himself prayed would not fail, for the express purpose of strengthening the brethren (Luke 22:32).

Now the longer and more important list, what infallibility is *not*, and give it slowly: not impeccability, popes sin, sometimes spectacularly, Session Nine was about exactly this; not inspiration, the pope receives no new revelation, and the Catechism says the Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on (CCC 86); not omniscience, wisdom, prudence, or administrative competence; not every papal sentence, homily, interview, encyclical paragraph, or opinion about anything; not a power the pope switches on at will for his preferences, since the charism binds him to the deposit more tightly than anyone, he is the most constrained teacher on earth, the one man who cannot bind the Church to his own ideas as the faith. Exercised in the solemn ex cathedra form, it is vanishingly rare: the Assumption of Mary, defined in 1950, is the standard example since the definition, with the Immaculate Conception (1854) its recognized precedent. The ordinary papal magisterium claims religious assent, not the charism's guarantee, and Catholics may say so plainly.

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The honest history, offered unprompted: the 1870 definition was contested inside the Church; a minority of council fathers, doubting the timing or prudence of defining, left Rome before the final vote rather than vote against, and a small number of Catholics, most famously the historian Döllinger, rejected the definition and broke communion. Tell it straight, then apply Session Ten's tool: definition is not invention. The council defined, under pressure of the age, what the study's own trail already showed in seed and growth: Clement's authority, Irenaeus's list, Jerome's chair, Leo's strength-of-the-rock, Augustine's rescripts. The 1870 conditions did not expand papal power; they fenced it, binding the office publicly to conditions it cannot exceed.

The style, and let it land as the study's final image: Gregory the Great, refusing the proud titles of his age, signed himself *servus servorum Dei*, servant of the servants of God, a signature that became, and remains, the traditional papal title. Behind it stands the towel of John 13: the Teacher and Lord washing feet and commanding imitation, and Luke 22's "let the leader become as one who serves," spoken in the same breath as the prayer for Peter. St. John Paul II, in *Ut Unum Sint*, described his own office to the whole Christian world in exactly these terms: a primacy of service whose mission is born from the mercy shown to Peter, and he asked even separated Christians to help him find ways of exercising it that serve unity better. The office's crown is a towel; the study should end with the group holding it.

Finally the Send, and make it explicit: this study was never about equipping twelve people to win arguments about the papacy. It was Luke 22:32 performed on them: strengthened so as to strengthen. Each participant leaves with a commission, a person, a place, a next study to lead. Feed my sheep was addressed to Peter; it echoes onto everyone who has ever been fed.

## **OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT**

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**Isaiah 22:20-24.** One last reading of the job posting, now with the study's full weight: the steward clothed and fathered and keyed, "a throne of honor to his father's house," the *cathedra* itself, and the whole weight of the house hanging on the peg. Every clause has been walked; tonight the group can recite what each means.

**Numbers 12:3 and Exodus 32:11-14.** Moses, "very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth," and Moses standing in the breach to intercede for the people who exhausted him: the Old Covenant's chief officer was its chief servant and chief intercessor. Meekness and authority were never opposites in God's economy; they are the same office seen from inside and outside.

**Zechariah 3:1-7.** Joshua the high priest, accused by Satan, defended by the LORD, given clean vestments and a charge: "if you will walk in my ways... you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts." The pattern of the whole study in one vision: an accused, defended, re-vested man given charge of God's house, on terms of walking, not of worth.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Leo the Great** *Sermon 3, On His Birthday as Pope*

Leo preaches the line that carried the Church through her worst holders: the dignity of Peter is not lacking even in an unworthy heir. The strength Christ gave the rock, Leo insists, remains Christ's gift and Christ's work; Peter's solidity persists in Peter's see because the Lord who conferred it does not withdraw it, and the merit of the office was never the merit of the man.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Gregory the Great** *Register of Letters, Book V (the "ecumenical patriarch" correspondence)*

When the patriarch of Constantinople styled himself ecumenical patriarch, Gregory answered not by grabbing a grander title but by adopting the humblest one in history: servant of the servants of God. Whoever exalts such titles, he wrote, is the forerunner of pride; and he governed the universal Church while calling universal titles poison. His signature became, and remains, the traditional papal title.

### VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. John Paul II** *Ut Unum Sint*

Writing to a divided Christendom, John Paul described the papacy as the ministry of unity whose mission is born from the mercy Christ showed to Peter, a primacy of service, and then did something no pope had done: he asked leaders of other Christian communities to help him find ways of exercising the office so that its service could be recognized by all. The keeper of the keys, asking the separated brethren to help him carry them: the office's style, in the office's own voice.

## CATECHISM CONNECTION

**CCC 890-891** gives the charism its exact shape: the pastoral duty of the Magisterium is to guard the people of God from deviations, and the pope enjoys the Church's own infallibility when, as supreme pastor, he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine of faith or morals: the conditions, the scope, and the purpose, in three sentences.

**CCC 882** states what the office is for: the pope is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful: unity is the job description.

**CCC 86** stands guard over everything: the Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening devoutly, guarding scrupulously, explaining faithfully. The most powerful teaching office on earth is, by its own constitution, the most bound.

## THREAD WATCH

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**The Revealed Confession thread resolves tonight.** Matthew 16:17 (the Father reveals the confession) plus Luke 22:32 (Christ prays the faith will not fail) equal, in the Church's mature language, the charism of CCC 891. Walk the equation explicitly at Build 3; the group planted both verses themselves and has earned the sum.

**Every thread gets its curtain call.** Fisherman to shepherd, the job posting, the office, the failing steward, follow me: recite the study's architecture with the group at Build 7. Twelve sessions of sealed guesses, live discoveries, and banked verses should be visible as one design; that visibility is itself the final apologetic.

**The Send is the point.** Do not let the night end as a seminar. Luke 22:32 must happen to the group: strengthened, they strengthen. Names on paper before anyone leaves.

## SESSION GOALS

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### 1.

Read the four pillars as one harmony: constitution, guarantee, care, operation.

### 2.

Define infallibility exactly, conditions first, and give the what-it-is-not list its full, slow length.

### 3.

Tell the honest history of 1870 unprompted and answer it with the development tool from Session Ten.

### 4.

Fix the office's style with the towel, Gregory's signature, and John Paul's open hand, and commission every participant by name.

## TIME NOTE

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75 to 90 minutes, and guard the last twenty for objections and the Send. If time runs short, compress Build 5, the 1870 history, into the leader's summary and cut the Dig Deeper. The Send is never cut; it is the study's destination.

## PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Opening Prayer:

*Lord Jesus, you built on rock, prayed at the table, questioned on the beach, and spoke through the council. Tonight, gather twelve sessions into one gift. Give us precision about what you promised, honesty about what you did not, and the towel you left as the measure of every office, including whatever office you are giving each of us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

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1.

Twelve weeks ago you wrote sealed guesses about a fisherman. What is the single moment of this study, a verse, a discovery, a session, that most changed how you see the Church?

2.

Think of the best boss, coach, or leader you ever had. What did they protect you from, and what did their authority make possible that its absence would have cost?

### BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

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1.

The harmony first. Four readers, four pillars, read back to back with no commentary: Matthew 16:15-19, Luke 22:25-32, John 21:15-17, Acts 15:7-12, 28. Then, as a group, give each scene a one-word or one-phrase title, and say what the four make together.

#### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Titles the group should land near: Caesarea Philippi is the *constitution*: revealed confession, rock, keys. The Last Supper is the *guarantee and the style*: the prayer that faith not fail, and leadership redefined as service. The beach is the *care*: love as the sole qualification, and a flock that stays Christ's own. Jerusalem is the *operation*: the steward's decisive testimony settling the doctrinal question within the college, and the council's decree sealed by the Spirit (Acts 15:28).

Together they are one office, whole: founded, guaranteed, pastoral, and functioning, with every text discovered by this group from the inside. Nothing tonight will be new; tonight we only name the sum.

## 2.

Now the word everyone brought objections about: infallibility. Before defining it, let us empty the room of the counterfeit. Popular imagination thinks it means something like "the pope is always right" or "the pope cannot sin." From this study alone, Sessions Five and Nine especially, why is that counterfeit already impossible?

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Because the study's own texts forbid it: Christ's prayer was for Peter's *faith*, explicitly not for his flawlessness, issued minutes before predicting his triple denial (Luke 22:32-34); the rock became a *skandalon* five verses after his investiture (Matthew 16:23); and Paul rebuked him to his face at Antioch for hypocrisy against his own true teaching (Galatians 2:11-14). The Catechism codifies it: the minister is not preserved from weakness, error in opinion, or sin (CCC 1550).

So whatever the Church means by infallibility, she cannot mean and has never meant "the pope is always right." She built her doctrine out of the same failure texts we did. The real definition is narrower than almost anyone outside the Church, and many inside, imagines, and precision here is charity. Now we define it.

## 3.

LIVE DISCOVERY. The definition, assembled from the group's own discoveries. Reread Matthew 16:17 and Luke 22:32 side by side one last time. What did the Father do for Peter's confession, and what did Christ do for Peter's faith, and for what stated purpose? Then the leader reads CCC 891 aloud. Match the Catechism's conditions to the seed texts.

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

The Father *revealed* the confession: Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," the seed of all his later teaching, was divinely sourced, not flesh and blood. Christ *prayed* for the faith, that it not fail, with the purpose built into the sentence: "strengthen your brethren." A protected confession, for the brothers' sake: that is the charism in seed.

The Church's mature statement (CCC 891): when the pope, as supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, proclaims *by a definitive act* a doctrine *of faith or morals*, he possesses the infallibility with which Christ willed his Church to be endowed. Three conditions, all necessary: exercising the universal shepherd's office (not the private theologian's), on faith or morals (not economics, science, or prudential judgment), definitively binding the whole Church (not musing, preaching, or giving interviews). Under those conditions, the confession is protected from error, so the brethren's faith has somewhere solid to stand. Outside them, the guarantee is simply not in play. It is a narrow, load-bearing beam, not a canopy over everything a pope says.

## 4.

The list of notes, slowly, because this list wins more hearts than the definition. Go around the group: from everything this study has shown, complete the sentence "infallibility is not..." as many ways as the texts allow. Then the leader adds any missing.

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

Not impeccability: popes sin, Session Nine at full volume. Not inspiration: no new revelation comes to the pope; the Magisterium "is not superior to the Word of God but serves it" (CCC 86). Not omniscience, wisdom, prudence, or good government: history is littered with the counterexamples, and Catholics may say so. Not every papal utterance: homilies, interviews, opinions, even most encyclical content claim religious assent, not the charism. Not a personal power switched on at will: the conditions bind him to the deposit, making the pope the least free teacher on earth, the one man who can never teach his own ideas as the faith.

And note how rarely the solemn form has been used: the Assumption of Mary in 1950 is the standard example since the definition, with the Immaculate Conception of 1854 its recognized precedent. A charism exercised twice in two centuries, hedged by conditions it cannot exceed, existing so that on the handful of questions where souls need certainty, certainty is findable. That is the actual doctrine, and most people who hate it have never met it.

**5.**

Honest history, unprompted. When Vatican I defined this in 1870, it was contested within the Church: a minority of bishops, doubting the prudence or timing of defining, left Rome before the vote rather than oppose it, and a few Catholics, the historian Döllinger most famously, rejected the definition and broke communion. Your friend says: "See, even Catholics knew it was a novelty." Answer with Session Ten's tool.

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

First concede the facts, because they are facts, and hiding them loses the room: the minority was real, their worries (about timing, about how the definition would be heard) were often sober, and the aftermath included real departures. The Church's own historians tell this story straight; so should we.

Then the tool: definition is not invention. Councils have always defined under pressure what the Church already possessed: Nicaea did not invent the divinity of Christ in 325; it fenced it against Arius. The 1870 conditions, read carefully, *restrict* rather than expand: they name the narrow circumstances under which the ancient confidence, Clement's authority, Irenaeus's list with which every church must agree, Jerome's "chair of Peter," Leo's strength-of-the-rock, Augustine's "the rescripts have come, the cause is finished", operates with guarantee, and by naming the conditions, they publicly bound every future pope to them. The acorn-and-oak test from Session Ten applies exactly: same organism, later ring. And notice which prediction history graded: the minority feared the definition would license papal caprice; a century and a half later it has been solemnly used once, for the Assumption. The fence held.

**6.**

LIVE DISCOVERY. Now the style, and it is the study's last discovery. Someone read John 13:12-15, the towel; then recall Luke 22:26-27, spoken in the same hour as the prayer for Peter. Then the leader reads

the Gregory voice box: what title did Gregory choose, against what, and what has every pope done with it since?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

The Teacher and Lord washes feet and commands the imitation: "you also ought to wash one another's feet... I have given you an example." And at the table, in the same hour he prayed for Peter, he fixed the grammar of every Christian office: "let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves." The office's crown, from the night of its founding, is a towel.

Gregory the Great made it a signature: pressed by a rival patriarch's grand title, he answered with the humblest in history, *servus servorum Dei*, servant of the servants of God, and warned that lofty titles are the forerunner of pride. The signature became, and remains, the traditional papal title. And in our own lifetime, St. John Paul II described the office to divided Christendom as a primacy of service born from the mercy shown to Peter, and asked other Christians to help him find better ways to exercise it, the keeper of the keys, asking the separated brethren to help him carry them. When the office is true to itself, that is its voice.

**7.**

Curtain call for the architecture. As a group, from memory, recite the study's threads and where each resolved: the fisherman's job, the job posting, the office, the failing steward, follow me, and tonight's revealed confession. What does seeing the whole design do to the claim the study has been testing?

**ANSWER · share after the discussion**

The recital: fisherman to shepherd, sealed in week one, opened on the beach; the job posting, guessed blind, found in Isaiah 22 with the group's own hands; the office, from *episkopē* in the upper room through Clement's "other approved men"; the failing steward, from the peg of Isaiah 22:25 through Moses' seat to Antioch and Nathan; follow me, from the beach prophecy to the grave under the altar; and the revealed confession, from "flesh and blood has not revealed this" through "I have prayed for you" to CCC 891, resolved tonight.

What the whole design shows: the papacy is not a proof text; it is a pattern, laid across Torah, prophets, Gospels, Acts, epistles, and the earliest Fathers, discovered in this room piece by piece by people who often expected to find nothing. A single verse can be argued with; a design this distributed can only be either seen or looked away from. Each person must now say which they have done, and that is not the leader's job. It is the Father's (Matthew 16:17).

**DIG DEEPER · The keys and the towel**

Hold the study's two objects side by side one last time. The keys: Davidic, official, succession-built, heaven-ratified, the steward's authority over the house. The towel: kneeling, water, other people's feet, the same night. The world thinks these are opposites and keeps trying to make the Church choose. Christ handed Peter both in the course of his ministry, the keys at Caesarea Philippi and the towel on the night before he died, and never explained how they fit, except by dying, which turned out to be the explanation. Every renewal of the papacy in history, Gregory, the reforming popes, the martyrs' line, has been the towel reclaiming the keys. Every scandal has been the keys forgetting the towel. Pray for the man who holds both.

## 8.

The Send, and it is not rhetorical. Luke 22:32 has now been done *to you*: twelve sessions of strengthening. The verse's grammar does not permit it to stop here: "when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." So, concretely, before anyone stands up: who is your brethren, name an actual person or group, and what is your feeding, one concrete act or commitment, with a date? Write it down. Then we pray each other out.

### ANSWER · share after the discussion

Leaders: paper and pens, real names, real dates, spoken aloud by whoever will. Some will name a sibling who left the Church, a coworker full of questions, a small group they could start, this very study they could now lead, and they can: everything needed is in their hands and their margins. The office this study examined exists to strengthen the brethren; the study itself was a small participation in it, and participation is transitive.

The last word belongs to the beach, so give it: the Lord's final recorded question to Peter was not about doctrine, office, or Rome. It was "do you love me," and the commission followed the answer. Same order for this room: loved, restored, asked, sent. Feed my sheep.

## SEND · TAKING IT WITH US

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### 1.

Who received your name tonight, and what is the date you wrote next to it? Tell one person in this group so it cannot quietly evaporate.

### 2.

Twelve weeks with the fisherman: what is the one sentence you would now say to the person you were on night one, and to whom do you owe that same sentence next?

## LIVE IT THIS WEEK

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### 1.

Execute your Send commitment this week: the named person, the concrete act, the date. Report back to one group member; strengthening is a team sport.

### 2.

Make the study's habit permanent: the daily Our Father for the pope, for life. This week's addition, the last: "Lord, keep your steward's hands on the keys and his knees at the basin, and make me a strengthener of my brethren."

### 3.

Consider leading: this guide, this format, these questions are now yours. Pray this week about gathering your own table of twelve, and tell your leader what you hear.

**Closing Prayer:**

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God: you renamed a fisherman, keyed a steward, prayed for a friend, fed us by his hands, and never once let go of your flock. Thank you for the rock and for the towel, for the office and for the mercy underneath it. Strengthen your servant who holds the keys today. And send us, turned again, to strengthen our brethren. St. Peter, fisherman, shepherd, and martyr, pray for us. Amen.*

**Scripture Memory Verse:** "Rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves... But I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:26-27, RSV2CE)

## PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Twelve, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

### PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Build 1 harmony: the constitution

**Luke 22:25-32**

Builds 1, 3, 6: guarantee and style

**John 21:15-17**

Build 1 harmony: the care

**Acts 15:7-12, 28**

Build 1 harmony: the operation

**Matthew 16:17**

Live discovery, Build 3: the revealed confession

**John 13:12-15**

Live discovery, Build 6: the towel

**Galatians 2:11-14; Matthew 16:23; CCC 1550**

Build 2: the counterfeit dismissed

**Zechariah 3:1-7; Numbers 12:3; Exodus 32:11-14**

Leader background: accused, defended, charged

**Isaiah 22:20-24**

OT Roots: the job posting, final reading

**CCC 86; 882; 890-891**

Catechism Connection and Builds 3-4