
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.

INTO THE DEEP

A Catholic Journey with Simon Peter

A Twelve-Session Inductive Bible Study for Young Adults

Duc in altum. Put out into the deep. (Luke 5:4)

Complete Leader Guide with Take-Home Sheets

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

USING THIS GUIDE

WHAT THIS STUDY IS

This is a kerygmatic study: its aim is not information about Simon Peter but an occasion of surrender to the Lord who called him. Across twelve sessions the group walks one man's whole arc, from the boats to the courtyard fire to the shore to Rome, and underneath the story runs the full proclamation of the Gospel: God acts first, the cross saves, mercy pursues, grace restores, the Spirit sends. Every session is built in the inductive pattern: relational openers, guided discovery in the text where the group finds the connections themselves, and a concrete sending. Sessions run 75 to 90 minutes; each includes a pre-chosen cut list in its Time Note.

THE THREE PARTS OF EACH SESSION

Part One, the Leader Preparation Guide, is yours alone: background, Old Testament roots, three Voices of the Church, Catechism connections, the leader-only Way of Salvation strand, Thread Watch, goals, and timing. **Part Two, the Discussion Guide**, is the script for the evening: prayers, questions, shaded ANSWER boxes to share only after the group has discussed, live discovery instructions, and Dig Deeper boxes. **Part Three, the Leader Reference Card**, lists every passage for quick pulpit-side navigation.

SPOILER DISCIPLINE (PLEASE READ CAREFULLY)

This study is engineered with long fuses: details planted in early sessions detonate weeks later, and the payoff belongs to the group. The cardinal rule: **never reveal a planted thread; ask questions until the group finds it**. The longest fuse is the charcoal fire: Session 7 requires you to make the group see and smell the fire and say absolutely nothing more; Session 9 lets them discover what Jesus rebuilt. Take-Home sheets are distributed AFTER each session and contain no answers, no advance discovery references, and no thread material; keep it that way if you adapt anything.

THE SEALED GUESS

Take-Home 1 carries a My Guess box: each participant writes what they think it will take for Simon to become the rock, plus a private second line (what would be hardest for them to leave in the boat), folds it, and keeps it sealed. Remind them weekly to keep the sheet safe. Session 8's dismissal and Take-Home 8 instruct everyone to BRING the sealed sheet to Session 9, where the guesses are opened and answered. Keep blank paper on hand in Session 9 for anyone who lost theirs.

THE RESPONSE MOMENT (SESSION 9)

Session 9 ends with ten protected minutes in which each participant writes a private prayer of surrender. Prepare the room: pens, paper, privacy, a candle or quiet instrumental music if that suits your group, and Eucharistic Adoration if it is available to you. Do not debrief the moment; follow up one on one during the week. This moment is the purpose of the whole study; guard it from the clock.

HONESTY STANDARDS

Where the Church has not defined a question (the agapao and phileo verbs, the authorship mechanics of 1 Peter, the meaning of the 153 fish), the guide says so plainly, and leaders should too. Extra-biblical material is always labeled: the martyrdom of Peter in Rome is presented as solid early history with its witnesses named;

the Quo Vadis story is presented as venerable tradition from the apocryphal Acts of Peter, not Scripture. This honesty is not a concession; it is what makes the certain things credible.

PRACTICAL NOTES

All Scripture quotations are from the RSV2CE; participants should bring a Bible (any faithful translation works for discussion, but read-alouds are smoothest when the leader reads RSV2CE). Sessions 9 and 12 run a full 90 minutes by design; announce it. Assign strong readers in advance for the long Acts readings in Session 10 and the four-reader Cornelius sequence in Session 11. Session 12 closes with a commissioning; if possible, schedule the group's Mass together as the study's true finale.

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Session 1: You Shall Be Called Rock

John 1:35-42 and Luke 5:1-11 | 75 to 90 minutes | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group discovers that Jesus calls Simon before Simon has done anything to deserve it, and that the encounter with divine holiness produces honest confession of sin, which Jesus answers not with dismissal but with mission.

Catholic Touchstone: Grace precedes every human response. The preparation of man for grace is itself a work of grace (CCC 2001). Simon is renamed before any recorded word, deed, or profession of faith of his own, called before he is worthy, and commissioned in the very moment he confesses his sin.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This session opens with two scenes, and their relationship matters. In John 1:35-42, Andrew, already a disciple of John the Baptist, meets Jesus first and immediately fetches his brother. Jesus looks at Simon and declares, “You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter). This is a first meeting, not yet the definitive call. In Luke 5:1-11, likely some time later back in Galilee, Jesus steps into Simon’s working life, borrows his boat, commands a catch against all professional judgment, and calls him to leave everything. The Gospels do not give us a precise timeline for harmonizing these scenes, and it is honest to say so if asked. What they clearly give us is a sequence of grace: Jesus knows Simon, names Simon, and claims Simon before Simon has done a single recorded thing.

A few background points will strengthen your leading. First, the renaming. In Scripture, God renames a person when He claims him for a mission: Abram becomes Abraham (Genesis 17:5), Jacob becomes Israel (Genesis 32:28). As far as our records show, Kepha (Aramaic for rock; in Greek, Petros) was not in use as a personal name in Israel. Jesus is not choosing from a list of names. He is minting a title, and He does it in the future tense: “You *shall be* called.” It is a promise about what grace will make of this man, not a description of what he is.

Second, the fishing. By the working knowledge of Galilean fishermen, night was the productive time for net fishing on the lake of Gennesaret; daylight in deep water was the least promising option. Simon and his partners had worked the right hours with professional skill and caught nothing. When Jesus, a carpenter’s son, tells a fisherman to try again in broad daylight in deep water, He is asking Simon to obey against his own expertise, in public, on the heels of failure. Simon’s answer contains the hinge of

the whole session: “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5). Faith rests on the word of Jesus, not on the evidence of the nets.

Third, Simon’s strange response to success. The catch does not make him feel lucky; it makes him feel unclean: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). Nearness to the Holy One reveals sin the way sunlight reveals dust in a room. Your group will discover for themselves that this exact pattern already happened seven centuries earlier in Isaiah 6, so do not reveal that connection in advance. Note carefully what Jesus does not say. He does not say “You are not that sinful,” and He does not grant the request to depart. He says, “Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men” (Luke 5:10). Honest confession of sin, met by Jesus, becomes the doorway to vocation.

Finally, the phrase that names this whole study. Jesus’ command in Luke 5:4, “Put out into the deep,” is *duc in altum* in the Latin of the Church. St. John Paul II took those two words as a watchword for the entire Church at the start of the new millennium. In this first scene Simon must be ordered into the deep, and he goes reluctantly. Keep that detail in your pocket; this study will return to it.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Isaiah 6:1-8 (the live discovery text; do not preview it). Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up, cries out “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5), is touched and reassured, and is commissioned: “Here am I! Send me” (Isaiah 6:8). The pattern is exact: manifestation of holiness, confession of unworthiness, reassurance, mission. Luke 5 replays it on a fishing boat.

The renaming pattern. Genesis 17:5 (Abram to Abraham, father of a covenant people) and Genesis 32:28 (Jacob to Israel, after wrestling with God). A God-given name declares a God-given destiny.

The reluctant call pattern. Moses protests “Who am I?” (Exodus 3:11); Jeremiah protests “I am only a youth” (Jeremiah 1:6). God consistently calls those who feel unqualified and supplies what they lack. Simon’s “Depart from me” stands in a long line of protests that God overrules with mission.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Ambrose of Milan | *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke, Book IV*

Commenting on this scene, St. Ambrose dwells on the fact that of all the boats on the shore, the Lord chooses Simon’s boat to teach from, and it is Simon whom He commands to put out into the deep. Ambrose reads the deep water as an image of the depths into which Christ calls His Church: deeper trust, deeper mystery, deeper waters than our own skill can fish. The Fathers loved to see in the boat that carries Christ and His word a picture of the Church herself. Offer that image as the Church’s cherished spiritual reading of the scene, not as the literal sense of the text.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

Preaching on John 1:41-42, St. Chrysostom marvels at two things. First, Andrew’s instinct: having

found the Messiah, he cannot rest until he has fetched his own brother, and so the greatest of the apostles is brought to Christ by a simple act of family evangelization. Second, the renaming: Jesus tells Simon what he shall be called, showing that He knows not only who Simon is but what He will make of him. For Chrysostom, the future tense of the name is a quiet declaration of divine foreknowledge and divine power: the One who names is the One who transforms.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Paul II | *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001)

At the close of the Great Jubilee, St. John Paul II gave the whole Church the words of Luke 5:4 as her program for the new millennium: *Duc in altum*, put out into the deep. He recalled how Peter and his companions trusted the word of Christ against a night of failure and let down the nets, and he urged every believer to remember the past with gratitude, live the present with enthusiasm, and look to the future with confidence, because the command spoken once from Simon's boat is spoken to us now. This study borrows its name from that command.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 208:** Faced with God's holiness, man discovers his own smallness and sinfulness. The Catechism cites this very scene, Peter's "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," alongside Isaiah's "Woe is me."
- **CCC 878:** Christ calls each of the apostles personally and by name; the call of God is never generic. Simon is called as Simon, in his own boat, in the middle of his own work.
- **CCC 2001:** The preparation of man for the reception of grace is already the work of grace. Simon's renaming before any merit of his own is this doctrine in narrative form.

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND, LEADER ONLY)

MOVEMENT 1 OF THE KERYGMA: GOD'S INITIATIVE

Each session of this study quietly dramatizes one movement of the core Gospel message. Tonight's movement: **God acts first**. Salvation begins not with our search for God but with His search for us. The didactic texts that state plainly what this scene shows in story: 1 John 4:19 ("We love, because he first loved us"); John 15:16 ("You did not choose me, but I chose you"); Ephesians 2:8-9 (saved by grace through faith, not our own doing). Near the end of this study the group will hear Peter himself preach this mechanic in his own words. One guardrail as you lead: God acts first does not mean God acts alone. The Catholic teaching is that God's free initiative demands man's free response (CCC 2002); grace precedes, invites, and empowers cooperation, and Simon's "at your word I will let down the nets" is that cooperation in the flesh. If discussion drifts toward "God does everything and we merely receive," point back to the man rowing the boat. Do not teach this strand aloud; let the story carry it. It is listed here so you always know which rail the session is running

on.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY, NEVER REVEAL)

- **The future-tense name.** Jesus says Simon shall be called Rock. Across this study, watch when the Gospels call him Simon and when they call him Peter, especially at his failures. The name is a promise under construction.
- **The boat and the deep.** Tonight Simon must be commanded into the deep and obeys reluctantly. Another boat scene at the end of this study will answer this one. Say nothing about it.
- **The sealed guess.** Take-Home 1 carries the My Guess box: what will it take for Simon to become the rock Jesus just named him? Participants write, fold, and keep it. It opens in Session 9. Collect nothing; they keep their own sheets.
- **Attachment at the point of abundance.** They left everything on the best fishing day of their lives. Surrender at the point of greatest attachment will recur.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group articulates, in their own words, that Jesus calls Simon before Simon is worthy, and that grace precedes every response.
2. The group discovers the Isaiah 6 pattern themselves and names the connection between encountering holiness and confessing sin.
3. The group recognizes that Jesus answers honest confession with mission, not dismissal.
4. Each participant privately identifies their own boat: the thing that would be hardest to leave.
5. Every participant leaves with Take-Home 1 and completes the sealed My Guess box before Session 2.

TIME NOTE

Core session runs about 75 minutes. If your group runs long: cut the second Dig Deeper box (Why Borrow a Boat?) and use only the first Win question. **Do not cut** the Isaiah 6 discovery in Question 5 or the two Send questions; they are the heart of the night.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you stepped uninvited into Simon's boat and made it your pulpit, and you speak to us now as you spoke to him. Give us tonight the honesty of the fisherman: to hear your word, to obey it against our own judgment, and to tell you the truth about ourselves without fear. You who called Simon before he was worthy, call us; we are listening. Come, Holy Spirit, and put out with us into the deep. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Open questions; every answer is welcome. Do not correct or steer.

W1. Tell us about a time someone saw potential in you that you could not yet see in yourself. What did their confidence do to you?

W2. When you hear the word “saint,” what kind of person comes to mind? Honestly: does it feel like something possible for you?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: John 1:35-42

1. Watch who does what in this scene. How does Simon end up standing in front of Jesus? What does Simon himself say or do?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Andrew finds Jesus first and immediately goes to get his brother; Simon is brought. In the entire scene Simon says and does nothing that the text records. Before Simon has spoken a single word in the Gospels, Jesus looks at him and renames him. Every ounce of initiative in this scene belongs to Jesus (and to Andrew, the first evangelist in the family). Let the group sit with how strange that is: the greatest of the apostles begins as a man standing silently while someone else's faith carries him.

2. Jesus says, “You shall be called Cephas,” in the future tense. What is the difference between a name that describes what you are and a name that declares what you will become?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

A descriptive name reports the past; this name is a promise about the future. In Scripture, God renames people when He claims them for a mission (if the group recalls Abram becoming Abraham or Jacob becoming Israel, celebrate it; if not, you may supply Genesis 17:5 and 32:28). Nobody in Israel is named Rock; Jesus is not picking a name, He is minting a title. And He mints it before Simon has done anything. The name is not a reward. It is a prophecy.

3. Be honest about the man we will watch for twelve sessions: does Simon look like a “rock” any time soon? Then why would Jesus give him this name now, at the very beginning?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

No. The man we are about to follow is impulsive, boastful, quick to sink, and capable of catastrophic failure. Jesus names the destination at the starting line. This is the first fingerprint of grace in the study: God's call is based on what His grace will accomplish, not on what we have already achieved. If Jesus waited for us to be rock before calling us rock, He would wait forever.

READ ALOUD: Luke 5:1-11

4. Jesus borrows a working man's boat, then tells a professional fisherman how to fish, in daylight, right after a failed night. Put yourself in Simon's sandals: what makes “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets” a hard sentence to say?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Everything about it costs him. His expertise says no: night is when you catch fish on this lake, and deep water in daylight is the last place his experience would send him. His exhaustion says no: the nets are already washed. His pride says no: the whole shore just watched him fail, and a second public failure would sting. The hinge of the sentence is “at your word.” Simon obeys not because the evidence improved but because of who is asking. That is a working definition of faith this group should hold onto: acting on the word of Jesus when your own judgment argues otherwise.

5. The catch works beyond all expectation, and Simon's response is bizarre. Not “thank you,” not “how did you do that?”, but “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Why would an act of pure generosity make a man suddenly feel his sin?

Live discovery: after the group wrestles with this, say: “This exact pattern already happened, about seven hundred years before this morning on the lake. Split into pairs, read Isaiah 6:1-8, and find every parallel you can between what happens to Isaiah and what just happened to Simon.” Give them several minutes. Let them report before you open the answer box.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The parallels the pairs should surface: a sudden manifestation of divine holiness (the Lord high and lifted up; the impossible catch); a cry of unworthiness in almost the same grammar (“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips” and “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord”); a word of reassurance (the burning coal and “your guilt is taken away”; “Do not be afraid”); and then, astonishingly, a commission (“Whom shall I send?” “Here am I! Send me”; “henceforth you will be catching men”).

Why does generosity expose sin? Because nearness to the Holy One reveals what distance concealed, the way sunlight reveals dust in a room that looked clean in the dark. Simon suddenly knows he is standing next to holiness itself, in his own boat, and the honest human response to that

nearness is Isaiah's response: I do not belong this close. The group has just discovered, from the text, the first two movements of the Gospel: God comes near in undeserved generosity, and His nearness shows us the truth about ourselves.

6. Look carefully at what Jesus does NOT say to Simon's confession. He does not say "You're not so bad," and He does not grant the request and depart. What does His actual answer, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men," tell us about how Jesus treats sinners who tell Him the truth?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

He neither minimizes the sin nor abandons the sinner. Jesus takes Simon's confession completely seriously, and then overrules the conclusion Simon drew from it. Simon reasoned: I am sinful, therefore depart from me. Jesus, in effect, answers: your sinfulness does not disqualify you; follow me, and I will make you a fisher of men. The world's logic says clean yourself up first, then come. The Gospel's logic says come, and grace will do the cleansing, the transforming, and the sending, never bypassing Simon's freedom but working through it: his "at your word" is his cooperation. Honest confession is not a disqualification from vocation; in this scene it is the doorway through which the mission arrives.

7. "They left everything and followed him" immediately after the greatest catch the text records: nets breaking, two boats near sinking. Why leave when the nets are fullest? Would it not make more sense to follow Jesus AND keep the fishing business?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The catch was never the point; it was a sign pointing past itself. Simon leaves the fish because he has seen the One who commands the fish, and the gift is nothing next to the Giver. Notice the mercy in the timing: the call comes not after the empty nets but after the full ones, so that what Simon leaves is not failure but abundance. Surrender that costs nothing proves nothing. Real surrender happens at the point of greatest attachment, and the timing of the call, at the moment of greatest abundance, invites us to see exactly that. Let the group feel that: He is not after our leftovers.

DIG DEEPER: THE NAME

The Aramaic word Jesus actually spoke is *Kepha*, rock. St. John preserves the original: "You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). In Greek it becomes *Petros*, in Latin *Petrus*. As far as our records show, it was not in use as a personal name in Israel; Jesus is not selecting a name but creating a title. Every time this study says "Peter," we are repeating a promise Jesus made before Simon had done anything at all.

DIG DEEPER: WHY BORROW A BOAT?

Of all the boats drawn up on that shore, Jesus chooses Simon's, sits down in it, and teaches the

crowds from it. The Fathers of the Church, St. Ambrose among them, delighted in the picture: Christ teaching the people from Peter's boat. They saw in it an image of Christ teaching the world from within His Church. Hold the image lightly; it is the Church's cherished spiritual reading of the scene rather than the literal sense. But it is worth noticing whose boat He wanted.

SEND: TAKING IT WITH YOU

S1. Jesus' call reached Simon in the middle of his ordinary work, using his ordinary tools, on an ordinary bad morning. Where is the middle of YOUR ordinary life, and what would it mean to let Jesus step into it uninvited this week?

S2. Simon said, "Depart from me," and Jesus stayed. What is the honest sentence you have been avoiding saying to Jesus? Are you willing to say it this week, and let Him stay?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray with Luke 5:1-11 once this week, slowly, placing yourself bodily in the scene the way St. Ignatius taught: feel the boat, smell the nets, hear the command. Stay in the boat until you can honestly answer, "What is Jesus asking me to put out into?"
2. Once this week, when you feel unqualified for something good in front of you, say silently: "At your word I will let down the nets," and do the thing.
3. Come next week having noticed one place in your life where your own competence has quietly made trusting God feel unnecessary.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you knew Simon's name before he knew yours, and you know ours. We have heard you tonight say "Do not be afraid" to a man who told you the truth about himself. Give us the courage to tell you the truth about ourselves, and the faith to hear you answer with a calling instead of a condemnation. We put out into the deep at your word. St. Peter, pray for us. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

Luke 5:4 (RSV2CE)

Before you dismiss: hand every participant Take-Home 1. Point out the sealed My Guess box on it and ask them to write their guess this week, fold it closed, and keep the sheet somewhere they will not lose it. Tell them only this: "We will open it together later in the study." Say nothing else about it.

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Texts (read aloud in session)

- John 1:35-42, Andrew brings Simon; Jesus renames him Cephas
- Luke 5:1-11, the borrowed boat, the catch, “Depart from me,” the call

Live Discovery Text (group finds the parallels)

- Isaiah 6:1-8, holiness, confession, reassurance, commission

Supporting Texts (supply if needed)

- Genesis 17:5, Abram renamed Abraham
- Genesis 32:28, Jacob renamed Israel
- Exodus 3:11, Moses: “Who am I?”
- Jeremiah 1:6, Jeremiah: “I am only a youth”

Way of Salvation Strand (leader only)

- 1 John 4:19, “We love, because he first loved us”
- John 15:16, “You did not choose me, but I chose you”
- Ephesians 2:8-9, saved by grace through faith
- Acts 15:11, Peter preaching salvation by grace (resolves late in study)

Catechism

- CCC 208, holiness encountered, sinfulness confessed (cites Luke 5:8)
- CCC 878, called personally and by name
- CCC 2001, grace precedes and prepares every response
- CCC 2002, God's free initiative demands man's free response (leader guardrail)

Memory Verse

- Luke 5:4, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”

Take-Home 1: You Shall Be Called Rock

Keep this sheet. You will need it again later in the study.

WHAT WE FOUND

Before Simon spoke a single recorded word, Jesus looked at him and renamed him: “You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter) (John 1:42). Cephas is Aramaic for rock. Future tense. Not a description of the impulsive fisherman standing there, but a promise about what grace would make of him. Then, on the lake, Jesus stepped into Simon's ordinary working life, borrowed his boat, and asked a professional to fish against his own judgment. “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5). Faith acted on the word of Jesus, not on the evidence.

Then came the strangest moment of the night. Overwhelming generosity did not make Simon feel lucky; it made him feel unclean: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). Together we found the same pattern in Isaiah 6: holiness comes near, sin is confessed, God reassures, and then, astonishingly, God sends. Jesus did not tell Simon his sin was no big deal, and He did not depart. He answered honest confession with a mission: “Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men” (Luke 5:10). And on the best fishing day of his life, Simon left everything. Surrender happened at the point of greatest attachment.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Ambrose of Milan / *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke, Book IV*

Of all the boats on the shore, the Lord chose Simon's to teach from, and it was Simon He commanded into the deep. St. Ambrose read the deep water as the depths into which Christ calls His people: deeper trust, deeper mystery, waters beyond our own skill. The Fathers cherished the picture of Christ teaching the crowds from Peter's boat.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

St. Chrysostom marvels that Andrew, having found the Messiah, could not rest until he fetched his own brother; the greatest of the apostles was brought to Christ by simple family evangelization. And when Jesus renamed Simon, He was foretelling, not describing: the One who names is the One who transforms.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Paul II | *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001)

At the start of the new millennium, St. John Paul II gave the whole Church the words of Luke 5:4 as her program: *Duc in altum*, put out into the deep. The command spoken once from Simon's boat is spoken to each of us now: remember the past with gratitude, live the present with enthusiasm, look to the future with confidence.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray with Luke 5:1-11 once this week, slowly, placing yourself bodily in the scene: feel the boat, smell the nets, hear the command. Stay there until you can honestly answer, "What is Jesus asking me to put out into?"
2. Once this week, when you feel unqualified for something good in front of you, say silently: "At your word I will let down the nets," and do the thing.
3. Come next week having noticed one place in your life where your own competence has quietly made trusting God feel unnecessary.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

Luke 5:4 (RSV2CE)

MY GUESS (WRITE IT, FOLD THIS BOX CLOSED, AND DO NOT OPEN IT UNTIL YOUR LEADER SAYS SO)

Jesus just named Simon "Rock" before he had done anything to earn it. **What do you think it will take for Simon to actually become that man?** Write your honest guess below. Then one more line, just for you: **what would be hardest for YOU to leave in the boat?**

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **Matthew 14:22-33**. Bring this sheet back with your guess folded closed.

Catechism references from tonight: CCC 208, 878, 2001.

Session 2: Lord, Save Me

Matthew 14:22-33 | 75 to 90 minutes | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group discovers that faith is not the absence of fear or wind but the direction of our attention and our cry; that we cannot save ourselves from the deep; and that Jesus' hand reaches the sinking man before His question does.

Catholic Touchstone: Salvation is rescue. "Lord, save me" (Matthew 14:30) is a complete prayer in three words: it confesses our incapacity, names the Savior as Lord, and asks. It is the Gospel in miniature, the whole message in seed form, and Jesus answers it immediately.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Context first. This scene follows directly on the feeding of the five thousand, and St. John adds a detail Matthew assumes: the crowd wanted to seize Jesus and make him king (John 6:15). Jesus responds by dismissing the crowd, compelling the disciples into the boat (Matthew says He "made" them get in), and climbing the mountain alone to pray. Notice what that means: the disciples row into the storm in an act of obedience. The hard night is not a punishment and not an accident outside the plan; it happens inside the will of Christ, who, St. Mark tells us, saw them "making headway painfully" from the mountain (Mark 6:48). He comes to them in the fourth watch, between three and six in the morning, after they have rowed most of the night. He lets them row long, and He comes at the darkest hour, walking on the very thing they fear.

Second, the sea-walking itself is a wordless claim. In the Old Testament it is God alone "who trampled the waves of the sea" (Job 9:8), whose "way was through the sea" though His "footprints were unseen" (Psalm 77:19). For hearers steeped in the Psalms, the scene carries a claim: the One coming across the water is doing what their Scriptures say only the God of Israel does, though the disciples themselves grasp it only slowly, crying out at first, "It is a ghost!" And His word of comfort sharpens it: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear" (Matthew 14:27). The Greek behind "it is I" is *egō eimi*, I AM. In the Greek Old Testament, God's name at the burning bush opens with this phrase, *egō eimi ho ōn*, "I AM the One who is" (Exodus 3:14), and the bare *egō eimi* is God's own self-declaration in Isaiah (e.g., Isaiah 43:10 LXX). At the literal level the phrase can simply mean "it's me," and it is honest to say so; but Matthew has stacked the scene (divine sea-walking, the divine "fear not," and the disciples' closing worship) in a way that invites the deeper hearing.

Third, watch Peter's request carefully, because it is easy to misread as recklessness: "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water" (Matthew 14:28). Peter does not jump. He asks for a command first, and only walks when he has one. This is the lesson of Session 1 already taking root: "at your word I will let down the nets" has become "command me, and I will come." Faith acts on the word of Jesus, not on impulse. Eleven men stayed in the boat; one asked for a word and got out.

Fourth, the sinking. "But when he saw the wind, he was afraid" (Matthew 14:30). Read that clause slowly with your group: the wind had been blowing the entire time. Nothing in the circumstances changed. What changed was the direction of Peter's attention. While he looked at Christ, the impossible held; when he looked at the danger (and, perhaps, at himself doing the impossible), he went down. Then the three words, and then the detail the whole session turns on: "Jesus *immediately* reached out his hand and caught him" (Matthew 14:31). The rescue comes first. The question, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?", comes after, asked at arm's grip, inside the rescue. Jesus does not lecture a drowning man. And "little faith" is not "no faith": the cry itself was faith, and it was enough.

Finally, the ending plants next session. The men in the boat worship: "Truly you are the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33). Hold that in your pocket; in two weeks Jesus will ask them to say who He is when there is no storm, no miracle, and no rescue fresh in their minds.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Psalms 69:1-3, 13-15 and Jonah 2:2-6 (the live discovery texts; do not preview them). Throughout Scripture, deep waters are the standing image of death, sin, and overwhelm: "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck" (Psalm 69:1); Jonah cries "out of the belly of Sheol" as the waters close over him. And the standing answer is a God who draws His people out: "he drew me out of many waters" (Psalm 18:16). Peter's three words on the sea are the whole tradition of the Psalms compressed into a single cry.

The divine sea-walker. Job 9:8 and Psalm 77:19, God alone tramples the waves; His path is through the sea. Supply these in the answer to Question 2 if the group does not surface them.

The name from the bush. Exodus 3:14, "I AM WHO I AM," behind the *egō eimi* of Matthew 14:27. Handled in the first Dig Deeper box with appropriate hedging.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine / *Sermon 76 (on Matthew 14)*

Preaching on this Gospel, St. Augustine sees in Peter on the waves a figure of the Church and of every Christian soul: strong when he looks to Christ, tottering the moment he presumes on himself. For Augustine the whole scene is a portrait of grace and weakness in one man: Peter walking is what we are by Christ's power; Peter sinking is what we are by our own; and Peter crying out is the only wisdom left to us, because the Lord who permitted the wavering is the same Lord who stretches out His hand. He lets us feel our weakness so that we will not forget whose strength was carrying us.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom | *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew, Homily 50*

St. Chrysostom notices the Lord's training method in this scene: He does not calm the storm from the mountain, and even when He comes, He does not immediately end the disciples' fear, because He is teaching them endurance and weaning them from the need for instant relief. Of Peter, Chrysostom observes that his love outran his strength: warm in devotion, he asked to come, but the weakness of nature overtook him in the wind. And the Lord's response is a physician's: He lets Peter feel the danger just long enough to learn his own measure, then seizes him, and corrects him only after he is safe.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thérèse of Lisieux | *Letter 197 to Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart (17 September 1896) and Story of a Soul (Manuscript C)*

Fifteen centuries later, a young Carmelite Doctor of the Church taught a spirituality that this scene pictures perfectly. St. Thérèse taught that it is confidence, and confidence alone, that leads us to Love: not the size of our strength but the boldness of our trust in His. She saw herself as a little soul with empty hands, too small to climb the stairs of perfection, and so she let herself be lifted. Read through her eyes, Peter sinking with his hand stretched toward Christ is the Little Way in a single image: sanctity is not walking on water by our own balance; it is being caught.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 448:** In the Gospels, people who approach Jesus call him “Lord”; the title expresses respect and trust from those who seek help and healing, and on the lips of the disciples after the Resurrection it becomes adoration. Peter’s “Lord, save me” stands in that line: petition already leaning toward worship.
- **CCC 164:** Faith is often lived in darkness; the world we experience can seem far from what faith assures us, and trials can shake it. Peter between the boat and Jesus, wind in his ears, is the picture of CCC 164.
- **CCC 273:** Only faith can embrace the mysterious ways of God’s almighty power, which is made perfect in weakness. Peter learns God’s strength precisely at the point where his own gives out.

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND, LEADER ONLY)

MOVEMENT 2 OF THE KERYGMA: OUR INCAPACITY AND THE CRY OF FAITH

Last week: God acts first. This week: **we cannot save ourselves, and the cry for rescue is itself an act of faith that is enough for Him to save.** Deep water is Scripture’s picture of the human condition; nobody swims out of it. The didactic texts that state what this scene shows: Psalm 3:8 (“Deliverance belongs to the LORD”); Joel 2:32 with Romans 10:13 (“every one who calls upon the

name of the Lord will be saved”). File this away and tell no one: in Session 10 the group will hear Peter, at Pentecost, preach Joel 2:32 to the crowds (Acts 2:21). The man who cried “Lord, save me” will spend the rest of his life telling people that everyone who cries it will be saved. Guardrail as before (CCC 2002): the cry is grace-enabled, and it is still truly Peter’s cry; grace does not bypass his freedom, it rescues through it. Do not teach this strand aloud; let the story carry it.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY, NEVER REVEAL)

- **The pattern in miniature.** Bold beginning, wavering attention, collapse, cry, rescue, gentle correction. Fix this rhythm in your mind; Peter will live it again on a much larger stage later in the study, and the group should be allowed to recognize it themselves when it comes. Say nothing.
- **The word before the step.** “Command me” echoes “at your word” from Session 1. The thread of acting on Jesus’ word against the visible evidence is now two sessions long.
- **The boat confession.** “Truly you are the Son of God” (14:33) is spoken by the group after a rescue. Session 3 will ask what Peter says when Jesus asks in cold blood, far from any storm. This week’s ending is next week’s setup.
- **Sealed guess.** No action this week except a reminder at dismissal: keep the Take-Home 1 sheet safe, guess folded. Do not discuss its contents.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group articulates that the wind never changed; Peter’s attention did. Faith is the direction of our gaze and our cry, not the absence of fear.
2. The group discovers the deep-waters imagery of Psalm 69 and Jonah 2 and names “Lord, save me” as the Gospel in miniature.
3. The group recognizes the order of rescue and rebuke: the hand comes before the question, and correction happens inside salvation, never instead of it.
4. Each participant identifies one area of life where they have been trying to save themselves.
5. Participants are reminded to keep their sealed My Guess sheet safe; distribute Take-Home 2.

TIME NOTE

Core session runs about 75 minutes. If your group runs long: cut the second Dig Deeper box (The Fourth Watch) and the first Win question. **Do not cut** the Question 5 discovery or the Send questions.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you see us rowing when we think we are alone, and you come to us across the very things we fear. Speak tonight the word you spoke on the water: take heart, it is I, have no fear. Give us the honesty to admit we are in over our heads, and the faith to cry out to you by name. Catch us, Lord, as you caught Simon, and do not let go. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Open questions; every answer is welcome. Do not correct or steer.

W1. Tell us about a time you were genuinely in over your head, literally or figuratively. What did you do?

W2. In your experience, what is the difference between doubting that God exists and doubting that He will come through for you? Which one do you actually wrestle with more?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Matthew 14:22-27

1. Look at verse 22: Jesus “made” the disciples get into the boat. They are rowing into this storm because they obeyed. What does it do to your picture of Jesus that the hard night is not an accident, and not a punishment, but happens inside His plan while He watches from the mountain?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

This quietly dismantles a false gospel many people carry: that if I obey, the water stays calm, and that storms are proof I took a wrong turn. The disciples are exactly where Jesus put them, and it is brutal there. St. Mark adds that Jesus saw them straining at the oars (Mark 6:48). He is not absent; He is praying, watching, and timing His approach. And when He comes, He comes in the fourth watch, the darkest stretch before dawn, walking on the very thing they are afraid of. Obedience does not exempt us from the storm; it means the One who sent us into it sees us and comes to us, often later than we would schedule.

2. A man walking on the sea: to a boatful of Jews raised on the Psalms, this is not just a wonder, it is a claim. What is Jesus claiming without saying a word? And listen to the word He does say: “Take heart, it is I; have no fear.”

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

In the Old Testament, walking on the sea is God's signature move and His alone: it is God “who trampled the waves of the sea” (Job 9:8), whose “way was through the sea” though His “footprints were unseen” (Psalm 77:19). Supply those texts if the group does not surface them. Jesus is doing, in front of eyewitnesses, what their Scriptures say only the God of Israel does. And His “it is I” carries a deeper register the first Dig Deeper box explores. The claim beneath the miracle: the One coming toward you across your fear is the LORD.

READ ALOUD: Matthew 14:28-33

3. “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” Is this faith or recklessness? Look closely at what Peter asks for before he moves.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Notice: Peter does not jump. He asks for a command, and he only steps out when he has one. This is Session 1 bearing fruit: the man who said “at your word I will let down the nets” now says “command me, and I will come.” Faith is not impulse plus adrenaline; it is action on the word of Jesus against the visible evidence. Recklessness would be leaping without the word. Presumption would be assuming the power is his own. Peter does neither, yet. And do not let the group miss the other detail: eleven men heard the same voice and stayed in the boat. Whatever we say about Peter's sinking in a moment, he is the only one who found out the water holds.

4. Verse 30: “But when he saw the wind, he was afraid.” Here is the strange thing: the wind had been blowing the entire time. So what actually changed?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

His attention. The circumstances are identical from the first step to the sinking; what moved was the direction of his gaze. While Peter looked at Christ, the impossible held under his feet; when he looked at the danger, and perhaps at himself doing the impossible, he went down. This is one of the most practically useful discoveries in the whole study, so let the group chew it: fear is usually not new information, it is old information newly stared at. Faith is not pretending there is no wind. Faith is deciding, moment by moment, what you will look at. The wind is real; so is the Lord. The question is which one has your eyes.

5. Sinking, Peter cries out three words: “Lord, save me.” It is one of the shortest prayers in the Bible, and Jesus answers it instantly. Why is this tiny prayer enough?

Live discovery: after some discussion, say: “Peter is praying in a very old language tonight. Split into pairs: half of you read Psalm 69:1-3 and 13-15, half read Jonah 2:2-6. Find what deep water means in the Scriptures, and what God does about it.” Give them several minutes and let both halves report before opening the answer box.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

What the pairs should surface: in Scripture, deep water is the standing image of death, sin, and

everything that is over our heads. “Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck... I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold” (Psalm 69:1-2). Jonah cries out “out of the belly of Sheol” as “the waters closed in over me” (Jonah 2:2, 5). And the standing answer is a God who draws His people out of the deep (see also Psalm 18:16, “he drew me out of many waters”). In these texts, nobody saves himself from the deep: the psalmist and Jonah alike are drawn out by God.

So why is the tiny prayer enough? Because it is the Gospel in miniature, the whole message in seed form. “Lord”: it names who He is. “Save”: it admits what I cannot do for myself. “Me”: it stops hiding behind generalities and hands Him my actual self. It is the prayer of a man with no leverage left, and that is exactly the prayer God has been answering since the Psalms. The group should leave tonight owning this prayer; they will use it for the rest of their lives.

6. Verse 31: “Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him,” and only then, “O man of little faith, why did you doubt?” Look hard at the order of the hand and the question. Why does the order matter?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Rescue first, question second. Jesus does not lecture a drowning man, and He does not make correction the price of the rescue; He asks His question at arm's grip, with Peter already safe. That order is a portrait of how Christ deals with every honest failure in this study and in this room: correction happens inside salvation, never instead of it. And weigh the words “little faith.” Not “no faith.” The cry itself was faith; small, soaked, and sinking, but aimed at the right Person, and it was enough. If anyone in your group believes their faith is too small to count, this verse is for them: little faith that cries out to Jesus is enough for Him to save. The power was never in the size of the faith; it is in the strength of the Hand it reaches for.

7. Be honest: was Peter's walk a failure? The other eleven stayed dry, safe, and unrebuked. By the time the wind stops, who knows Jesus better?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

All twelve end the night worshipping: “Truly you are the Son of God” (Matthew 14:33). But only one of them knows what His grip feels like. The eleven know Jesus rescued Peter; Peter knows Jesus rescued him. Wet failure that ends in the grasp of Christ gave Peter a firsthand knowledge of Him that the eleven, watching from the boat, did not receive that night. Be careful to press this rightly: the lesson is not recklessness, and the goal is not manufactured risk. The lesson is that obedience to His word, even when it ends in our sinking, lands us in His hands, and His hands are a safe place to land. Note carefully: the eleven were not disobedient; they were never commanded to come. The question is not whether staying was wrong, but what Peter learned in the water that could not be learned by watching. The group should wrestle honestly with which they would have chosen, and why.

DIG DEEPER: IT IS I

The Greek behind “it is I” (Matthew 14:27) is *egō eimi*, literally “I AM.” In the Greek Old Testament God’s answer at the burning bush begins with these words, *egō eimi ho ōn*, “I AM the One who is” (Exodus 3:14), and the unadorned *egō eimi* is His self-declaration in Isaiah (Isaiah 43:10 LXX). At the plain level the phrase can simply mean “it’s me,” and honesty requires saying so. But Matthew has surrounded it with God’s own signatures: walking on the sea, and the divine “fear not.” The Church has long heard the deeper register: in the dark, on the water, Jesus comforts His friends with the divine Name.

DIG DEEPER: THE FOURTH WATCH

The Romans divided the night into four watches; the fourth ran from about three to six in the morning. The disciples had been rowing since evening, and Mark tells us Jesus saw them straining, yet did not come until the fourth watch (Mark 6:48), after most of a night of rowing. Scripture keeps this pattern: God’s rescues often arrive in the last watch, later than we would schedule them. The Fathers read such delay not as neglect but as training. He is teaching them, and us, to keep rowing in the dark on the strength of who sent us out.

SEND: TAKING IT WITH YOU

S1. Where in your life right now are you “seeing the wind”: a situation where the circumstances have not actually changed, but your attention has locked onto the danger? What would it mean, concretely, to look back at Christ this week?

S2. “Lord, save me” takes three seconds to pray. What is the one area of your life where you have been quietly trying to save yourself? Are you willing to pray those three words over it, honestly, every day this week?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Learn the three-word prayer by heart (you already have) and pray it every single time you feel overwhelmed this week, the moment you notice. Keep a private count. Tell no one the number; just notice what changes by Sunday.
2. Pray with Matthew 14:22-33 once this week, placing yourself in the scene: leave the boat, feel the water hold, feel the moment your eyes drift to the wind. Stay there until you have let Him catch you.
3. Notice one moment this week when your attention slid from Christ to the wind. Write a single sentence about what pulled it, and bring the sentence to next session (you will not have to share it).

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Son of God, you let Simon feel the water give way so that he would learn the strength of your hand. We hand you tonight the places where we are sinking, the winds we cannot stop staring at, and the weight of trying to save ourselves. Catch us. Teach us to pray the fisherman's prayer until it becomes our breath: Lord, save me. St. Peter, who knows His grip, pray for us. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Take heart, it is I; have no fear."

Matthew 14:27 (RSV2CE)

Before you dismiss: hand every participant Take-Home 2, and give one reminder only: "Keep your sheet from last week safe, guess folded. We will need it." Say nothing else about it.

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Text (read aloud in session)

- Matthew 14:22-27, the compelled crossing, the storm, the sea-walker, "it is I"
- Matthew 14:28-33, Peter's walk, the wind, "Lord, save me," the hand, the worship

Live Discovery Texts (group finds the parallels)

- Psalm 69:1-3, 13-15, waters up to the neck; no foothold; the cry
- Jonah 2:2-6, the belly of Sheol; the waters closed over me

Supporting Texts (supply if needed)

- Mark 6:48, He saw them straining at the oars; the fourth watch
- John 6:15, the crowd's attempt to make Him king (context)
- Job 9:8, God alone trampled the waves of the sea
- Psalm 77:19, His way through the sea, footprints unseen
- Psalm 18:16, "he drew me out of many waters"
- Exodus 3:14, I AM WHO I AM (Dig Deeper)

Way of Salvation Strand (leader only)

- Psalm 3:8, "Deliverance belongs to the LORD"
- Joel 2:32 / Romans 10:13, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved
- Acts 2:21, Peter preaching Joel 2:32 at Pentecost (resolves in Session 10; do not reveal)

Catechism

- CCC 448, “Lord” on the lips of those who seek His help
- CCC 164, faith lived and tested in darkness
- CCC 273, power made perfect in weakness
- CCC 2002, God's free initiative demands man's free response (strand guardrail)

Memory Verse

- Matthew 14:27, “Take heart, it is I; have no fear.”

Take-Home 2: Lord, Save Me

Keep your Take-Home 1 sheet safe, kept folded. We will need it.

WHAT WE FOUND

The disciples rowed into the storm because they obeyed; Jesus “made” them get into the boat (Matthew 14:22), and from the land He saw them straining at the oars against the wind (Mark 6:48). Obedience did not exempt them from the storm; it guaranteed that the One who sent them was coming. And He came in the fourth watch, walking on the very thing they feared, doing what the Scriptures say God alone does: trampling the waves of the sea. His word in the dark: “Take heart, it is I; have no fear” (Matthew 14:27).

Peter did not jump; he asked for a command first, and walked when he had one. “At your word” has become “command me.” Then verse 30: “when he saw the wind, he was afraid.” The wind had been blowing the whole time; the only thing that changed was where Peter was looking. And when he sank, three words were enough: “Lord, save me.” We traced that cry back through Psalm 69 and Jonah 2 and found the same pattern: the one in the deep does not save himself; he cries out, and God draws him out. “Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him” (Matthew 14:31), and only then, safe in His grip, came the gentle question. Rescue first, correction after; here the correction comes inside the rescue, not instead of it. And little faith that cries out to Jesus is enough for Him to save.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine | *Sermon 76 (on Matthew 14)*

St. Augustine sees in Peter on the waves a figure of every Christian soul: strong when he looks to Christ, tottering the moment he presumes on himself. Peter walking is what we are by Christ's power; Peter sinking is what we are by our own; and Peter crying out is the only wisdom left to us, because the Lord who permitted the wavering is the same Lord who stretches out His hand.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom | *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew, Homily 50*

St. Chrysostom sees the Lord's training method here: He permits Peter to feel the danger and learn his own measure, then immediately seizes him, and corrects him only after he is safe. Peter's love outran his strength; the Physician used the gap to teach him where strength lives.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thérèse of Lisieux | Letter to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (LT 197, September 17, 1896) and Story of a Soul

St. Thérèse taught that it is confidence, and confidence alone, that leads us to Love: not the size of our strength but the boldness of our trust in His. Applied to tonight's scene, Peter sinking with his hand stretched toward Christ gives her teaching a single image: sanctity is not walking on water by our own balance; it is being caught.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray "Lord, save me" every single time you feel overwhelmed this week, the moment you notice. Keep a private count. Tell no one the number; just notice what changes by Sunday.
2. Pray with Matthew 14:22-33 once this week, placing yourself in the scene: leave the boat, feel the water hold, feel the moment your eyes drift to the wind. Stay there until you have let Him catch you.
3. Notice one moment this week when your attention slid from Christ to the wind. Write a single sentence about what pulled it, and bring the sentence to next session (you will not have to share it).

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Take heart, it is I; have no fear."

Matthew 14:27 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **Matthew 16:13-20**. As you read, notice where the conversation happens and what Jesus asks first before He asks the question that matters.

Catechism references from tonight: CCC 448, 164, 273.

Session 3: Flesh and Blood Has Not Revealed This

Matthew 16:13-20 | 75 to 90 minutes | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group discovers that saving faith in who Jesus is comes as a gift from the Father, not as a conclusion we assemble ourselves, and that Jesus answers Peter's confession by building something on it: a name made true, keys handed over, a Church founded.

Catholic Touchstone: Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by Him (CCC 153, which cites this very verse). We cooperate with it, profess it, and act on it, but we do not manufacture it. Peter saw the same miracles as the crowds who guessed Elijah; what he had that they lacked was given, not deduced.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Geography is doing real work in this scene. Caesarea Philippi sits at the far northern edge of Israel, twenty-five miles from the lake, at the foot of Mount Hermon: pagan territory, dominated by a massive rock cliff with a cave sanctuary of the god Pan, ringed by shrines, near a temple built for Caesar. Matthew places the conversation "in the district of Caesarea Philippi" (16:13). The town itself was dominated by that cliff and its shrines; whether or not the group stood within sight of it, Jesus has deliberately brought His disciples into the most pagan corner of the land to ask who He is. He asks in two movements: first the polls ("Who do men say that the Son of man is?"), then the verdict ("But who do you say that I am?"). The crowd's answers are all compliments (John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, a prophet) and all wrong, because a category is not a confession.

Peter's answer stacks two titles: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). The Christ: the anointed Messiah, the son of David the kingdom was waiting for. The Son of the living God: more than a title of office, and the "living God" lands pointedly in front of Pan's dead grotto. Jesus' response is the interpretive key of the session: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). Peter did not out-reason the crowds. The Father unveiled it. Faith in the identity of Jesus is revelation received, and Peter's greatness in this scene is that he received it and said it out loud.

Then Jesus does what He has been waiting since John 1:42 to do: He makes the name stick. “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church” (Matthew 16:18). In the Aramaic Jesus spoke, the wordplay is seamless: you are *Kepha*, and on this *kepha* I will build. The Fathers read the rock richly: Peter himself, Peter’s confessed faith, and Christ confessed, and these readings complete rather than compete with each other, since Peter matters here precisely as the confessor. The Church cherishes this scene, with the keys and the binding and loosing, as the foundation of Peter’s office (CCC 552-553). This study’s aim is kerygmatic rather than apologetic, so present the office plainly and warmly without mounting a full defense; if your group wants the deeper argument, note it cheerfully as a study for another day and stay on tonight’s rail: the faith beneath the office was a gift.

Last, the strange ending: “Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ” (Matthew 16:20). Hold the tension honestly and do not resolve it tonight; next session resolves it. The likely reason, signaled by what follows immediately (16:21): their word “Christ” still means the wrong thing. Before they may preach the title, they must let Him define it.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Isaiah 22:19-23 (the live discovery text; do not preview it). The king of Judah’s palace had a chief steward, an office, not just a man. Isaiah 22 shows one steward (Shebna) removed and another (Eliakim) installed: robed, given authority, and handed “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). Keys in the Davidic kingdom mean a durable office of stewardship under the king. When the Son of David hands Simon “the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” the furniture of the scene comes straight from Isaiah.

2 Samuel 7:12-16. The covenant behind the whole conversation: David’s son will be given an everlasting kingdom, and God says “I will be his father, and he shall be my son.” Peter’s double title, Christ and Son, gathers up the Davidic hope.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Leo the Great / *Sermon 3 (on the anniversary of his elevation)*

Preaching on this scene, St. Leo dwells on the source of Peter’s confession: the flesh and blood of human opinion produced only the crowd’s guesses, but the Father’s revelation produced the confession on which everything else in the passage is built. For Leo, the blessing, the name, and the keys all rest on faith that came down from heaven first; Peter is great because he received greatly. What God builds, He builds on what He Himself has given.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

St. Chrysostom notices that Jesus takes the disciples far from the crowds and from Jewish territory before asking His question, so that they can answer freely, away from every pressure of opinion. And he marvels at Peter’s role: the mouth of the apostles, the one who loves ardently and speaks

first, here speaking not his own cleverness but the Father's disclosure. The same eyes that watched the loaves multiply belonged to thousands; the confession belonged to the one to whom it was revealed.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thomas Aquinas / *Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 6, a. 1*

St. Thomas asks where faith comes from and answers with this scene's logic made precise: the assent of faith, in which the whole act consists, cannot rise from human seeing or reasoning alone; it must be given by God, who moves us inwardly by grace. Arguments can clear the road, and witnesses can point, but the act by which a person says "You are the Christ" and stakes his life on it is infused from above. Faith is a gift before it is a decision, and a decision because it is a gift.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 153:** Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by Him; the Catechism quotes Matthew 16:17 directly. When St. Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, this did not come from flesh and blood.
- **CCC 424:** On the rock of the faith confessed by St. Peter, Christ built His Church.
- **CCC 552-553:** Peter's unique place among the Twelve; the keys, the power to bind and loose, the shepherd's charge.

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND, LEADER ONLY)

MOVEMENT 3 OF THE KERYGMA: REVELATION, FAITH IN WHO JESUS IS

Movement 1: God acts first. Movement 2: we cannot save ourselves. Tonight: **salvation hangs on who Jesus is, and knowing who He is comes as gift.** The didactic texts behind the scene: Matthew 16:17 itself; 1 Corinthians 12:3 ("no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit"); Ephesians 2:8-9. The practical edge for your praying this week: the people in your group who do not yet believe cannot be argued across the line; they can be loved, told the truth, and prayed for, because the crossing itself is the Father's gift. Guardrail as always (CCC 2002): gift does not mean puppetry; Peter freely opened his mouth. Do not teach this strand aloud.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY, NEVER REVEAL)

- **The name lands.** Session 1 planted "You shall be called"; tonight it becomes "You are Peter." The promise is being kept in stages. Watch what happens to the rock five verses later; say nothing tonight.

- **Two confessions compared.** Session 2 ended with “Truly you are the Son of God” gasped after a rescue. Tonight the same content is confessed in cold blood, no storm in sight. If a participant notices, celebrate it; do not point it out yourself.
- **The silence command.** “Tell no one” is next session’s door. Leave it deliberately unresolved tonight.
- **Sealed guess.** Standing reminder at dismissal only: keep the Take-Home 1 sheet safe.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group distinguishes reporting opinions about Jesus from personally confessing Him.
2. The group articulates that Peter’s faith was revealed by the Father, not deduced, and what that means for how anyone comes to faith.
3. The group discovers Isaiah 22 and names what keys mean in the house of David.
4. Each participant drafts, privately, their own present-tense answer to “Who do you say that I am?”
5. Distribute Take-Home 3; remind participants to keep the sealed sheet safe.

TIME NOTE

Core session runs about 75 minutes. If long: cut the second Dig Deeper (The Gates of Hades) and one Win question. **Do not cut** the Isaiah 22 discovery or the Send questions.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Father in heaven, no one comes to your Son unless you draw him, and no one calls Jesus the Christ except by your gift. Draw us tonight. Quiet in us the noise of what everyone else says, and let each of us hear the question He asks face to face. Give us the faith you gave the fisherman, and the courage to say it out loud. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Open questions; every answer is welcome. Do not correct or steer.

W1. What is something true about you that almost nobody gets right when they guess? How does it feel to be constantly half-known?

W2. If a stranger asked the people who know you best, “Who is Jesus to them?”, what would they honestly say about you, based on your life this past month?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Matthew 16:13-20

1. Jesus walked the Twelve twenty-five miles north to Caesarea Philippi to ask this: a pagan district built around a giant rock cliff crowded with shrines to Pan and a temple to Caesar. Why might He choose enemy territory, in a district famous for its wall of idols, to ask who He is?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The setting turns the question into a confrontation. Every generation has its wall of options: gods, heroes, emperors, dead prophets, and Jesus stands His friends in front of the whole marketplace and asks where He fits. The location also strips away home-field pressure; far from the crowds and the authorities, the disciples can answer freely. And if the famous cliff was anywhere in view, the scenery preached: a rock face full of dead gods, and Jesus about to name a living rock. He still asks the question in the middle of the marketplace, not the sanctuary; He is not afraid of the competition.

2. Notice the two questions. First: “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” The disciples answer easily and at length. Then: “But who do YOU say that I am?” What is the difference between those two questions, and why is the second one so much harder to answer?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The first question costs nothing; it is a poll, and you can discuss polls all night without ever being exposed. The second question has no hiding place: it demands the speaker put himself into the answer. Notice, too, that all the crowd's answers are compliments (the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah), and all of them are wrong, because a category is not a confession. You can respect Jesus into a category forever and never once answer His actual question. Every person in this room will eventually be asked the second question, and no one can answer it for us.

3. Peter answers: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus responds with something surprising: “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” Peter watched the same miracles as the crowds who guessed Elijah. So according to Jesus, where did Peter's answer actually come from, and what does that tell us about how anyone comes to believe?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

From the Father. Jesus explicitly rules out flesh and blood: Peter did not out-observe or out-reason the crowds, because the crowds had the same data. Faith in who Jesus is arrives as revelation received, a gift. This has two edges the group should feel. First, humility: if you believe, you did not achieve that; somewhere upstream of your reasons, the Father opened your eyes, so gratitude, not superiority, is the only fitting posture. Second, hope and a job description: the people you love who

do not believe cannot be argued across the line by you. Arguments clear roads; only God gives the gift. So we witness, we love, and above all we pray, because the decisive move belongs to the Father, and He likes to make it. Notice also that Peter still had to open his mouth: gift and courage cooperated.

4. Now Jesus keeps the promise He made at their very first meeting (John 1:42): “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church.” Back in Session 1 the name was future tense: “you shall be called.” What has changed, and what has not changed, about Simon between the promise and this moment?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

What changed: Simon has now received and confessed the Father's revelation. The name lands at the moment of confession, and the wordplay is seamless in Jesus' Aramaic: you are Kepha, and on this kepha I will build. The Fathers read the rock as Peter himself, as his confessed faith, and as Christ confessed, and the readings complete each other, since Peter matters here precisely as the confessor. What has not changed: the man. He is still impulsive, still untested, and the coming sessions will prove it painfully. Jesus builds on confessed faith, not on finished character, which is either alarming or the best news imaginable, depending on whether you think God should wait for us to be reliable first. He does not.

5. Jesus hands Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” That image is not invented on the spot; it is furniture from Israel's royal palace.

Live discovery: say: “In the kingdom of David, keys meant something specific. Read Isaiah 22:19-23 in pairs: who gets keys, what do keys let him do, and what kind of thing is being handed over, a compliment or something else?” Give them several minutes and let them report before the answer box.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

What the pairs should find: in the house of David there was a chief steward over the palace, and Isaiah 22 shows the office changing hands: Shebna removed, Eliakim installed, robed, given authority, and handed “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). Keys are not a compliment; they are an office of stewardship under the king, and offices outlast their first holders. So when the Son of David hands Simon the keys of the kingdom, with authority to bind and loose, He is not handing out a metaphor for feeling special; He is installing a steward in His kingdom. The Church has always cherished this scene as the foundation of Peter's office and ministry (CCC 552-553). Tonight's point sits underneath the office: the whole structure is built on faith the Father gave. If the group wants the full case for what this means for the Church across the centuries, honor the appetite and name it as a rich study for another day; then return to the rail.

6. Verse 20 is strange: after the greatest confession in the Gospels, Jesus “strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.” Why on earth would He silence the best news His friends have ever gotten right?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Let the group wrestle, then deliberately leave this open. The short version to gesture at, and the most likely reason given what follows in 16:21: their word “Christ” is still loaded with the wrong dictionary, a conquering king without a cross, and broadcasting the right title with the wrong meaning would set fire to the wrong hopes. Before they may preach the word, they must let Jesus define it, and His definition begins in the very next verse, which is where we start next week. End the question honestly unresolved: “Hold that itch until next session.”

DIG DEEPER: KEPHA

Jesus almost certainly spoke Aramaic here, and in Aramaic the sentence has one word where our translations have two: you are *Kepha*, and on this *kepha* I will build my Church. St. John preserves the Aramaic name directly as Cephias (John 1:42), and St. Paul uses it routinely in his letters. The Greek text renders the name *Petros* and the rock *petra* for grammatical gender, which has spawned centuries of debate; the underlying Aramaic wordplay is smooth as lake stone.

DIG DEEPER: THE GATES OF HADES

“The powers of death shall not prevail against it” reads literally “the gates of Hades,” the realm of the dead. One rich and ancient reading notes that gates are defensive; gates do not charge. On that view the image is not the Church huddling while hell attacks, but death's stronghold failing to hold out against a Church on the advance. Others hear a simpler promise: death's power will never destroy the Church. Either way, the promise is total. And if the saying was spoken anywhere near Caesarea Philippi's cave, which some pagans associated with the underworld, the scenery would only have sharpened it.

SEND: TAKING IT WITH YOU

S1. Strip away every answer you have inherited, from parents, parish, or culture. In your own words, present tense, this week of your life: who do YOU say that Jesus is? (You will not be asked to share unless you want to.)

S2. Peter's faith was a gift, which means someone in your life who does not believe is waiting on a gift, not an argument. Who is that person for you, and will you commit to praying for them, by name, every day until we finish this study?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Every morning this week, before your feet do anything important, answer His question out loud in one sentence: “Jesus, I say you are...” Let the sentence change during the week if it wants to.

2. Write your one-sentence confession somewhere you will find it again (journal, phone note, wallet). We are not done with it.

3. Begin praying daily, by name, for the one person you chose in the Send question. One sentence is enough: “Father, reveal your Son to them.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we bless you, Lord of heaven and earth, for what you hid from the wise you have revealed to fishermen, and to us. We confess with Simon Peter: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Guard this confession in us when the road turns hard, and give it to those we love who do not yet have it. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Matthew 16:16 (RSV2CE)

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 3 and give the standing reminder: “Keep your Session 1 sheet safe, guess folded.”

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Text

- Matthew 16:13-20, the two questions, the confession, the name, the keys, the silence

Live Discovery Text

- Isaiah 22:19-23, the steward's office and the key of the house of David

Supporting Texts

- 2 Samuel 7:12-16, the Davidic covenant: kingdom and sonship
- John 1:42, the promise of the name (Session 1 callback)
- Matthew 14:33, the boat confession (Session 2 callback, only if the group surfaces it)

Way of Salvation Strand (leader only)

- Matthew 16:17, flesh and blood has not revealed this
- 1 Corinthians 12:3, no one says Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit
- Ephesians 2:8-9, by grace through faith, the gift of God

Catechism

- CCC 153, faith as infused gift (quotes Matthew 16:17)
- CCC 424, the Church built on confessed faith
- CCC 552-553, Peter's keys and charge
- CCC 2002, free response (strand guardrail)

Memory Verse

- Matthew 16:16, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Take-Home 3: Flesh and Blood Has Not Revealed

This

Keep your Take-Home 1 sheet safe, with your guess still folded inside. We will need it.

WHAT WE FOUND

Jesus marched the Twelve to Caesarea Philippi, a pagan district built around a rock cliff crowded with shrines, and asked two questions. The poll was easy: people say the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, all compliments, all wrong, because a category is not a confession. Then the question with no hiding place: “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered for the ages: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

And Jesus told him where the answer came from: “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). Peter saw the same miracles as the crowds; what he had was given. Faith in who Jesus is arrives as a gift we receive and confess, which means gratitude for our own faith and prayer, not just argument, for those who do not yet share it. Then Jesus kept the promise from the beginning: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church,” and handed him the keys. We traced the keys back to Isaiah 22, where the key of the house of David marks a steward’s office in the kingdom, opened and shut under the king. Jesus builds on confessed faith, not finished character, and that is very good news for unfinished people.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Leo the Great | *Sermon 3*

The blessing, the name, and the keys all rest on faith that came down from heaven first. Peter is great because he received greatly; what God builds, He builds on what He Himself has given.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom | *Homilies on St. Matthew, Homily 54*

Jesus took the disciples far from every crowd so they could answer freely. Thousands of eyes watched the loaves multiply; the confession belonged to the one to whom the Father revealed it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thomas Aquinas / *Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 6, a. 1*

The assent of faith cannot rise from human reasoning alone; it is given by God, who moves us inwardly by grace. Faith is a gift before it is a decision, and a decision because it is a gift.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Every morning this week, answer His question out loud in one sentence: “Jesus, I say you are...” Let the sentence change during the week if it wants to.
2. Write your one-sentence confession somewhere you will find it again. We are not done with it.
3. Pray daily, by name, for the one person you chose: “Father, reveal your Son to them.”

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Matthew 16:16 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **Matthew 16:21-28** and **Matthew 17:1-8**. Notice the very first word of 16:21 and what it connects to.

Catechism references from tonight: CCC 153, 424, 552-553.

Session 4: The Things of Men

Matthew 16:21-28 and 17:1-8 | 75 to 90 minutes | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group discovers why the rock became a stumbling block in five verses: Peter confessed the right Christ with the wrong dictionary, a salvation without a cross. They discover that following Jesus means letting Him define the words we confess, and that the Transfiguration is given to sustain, not to replace, the road to Calvary.

Catholic Touchstone: There is no Christianity without the cross: not for Christ, and not for His disciples (CCC 618). The instinct to want the Messiah minus the suffering is not modern; it is apostolic, it earned the sharpest rebuke in the Gospels, and it lives in every one of us.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Matthew 16:21 opens with a hinge: “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things... and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” From that time: the confession unlocked the curriculum. Now that they know who He is, He can begin teaching what He came to do, and the Greek carries a small iron word, *dei*, it is necessary. The cross is not a risk He is running; it is the plan He is walking.

Peter's reaction is the whiplash of the New Testament: “God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matthew 16:22). He even takes Jesus aside to correct Him privately, the student rebuking the Teacher he just confessed. And Jesus answers with the harshest words He ever speaks to a friend: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men” (Matthew 16:23). The word for hindrance is *skandalon*, a stumbling stone. Five verses ago Simon was the rock the Church would be built on; now he is a rock in the road. Same man, same love, opposite function, and the difference is a single move: he confessed the right title and then tried to define it himself. A Messiah of victories without wounds is not the Father's plan; it is, quite literally, the devil's suggestion, the same kingdom-without-a-cross shortcut Satan offered in the wilderness. When Jesus says “Get behind me,” He is not expelling Peter; behind Him is where a disciple walks. He is telling Peter to stop standing in front of the plan and fall back into line.

Then Jesus universalizes it: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Be careful here as a leader, because this verse is mishandled in both directions. Denying yourself is not self-hatred, and the cross is not a poetic word for life's ordinary

annoyances. To deny yourself is to dethrone yourself: to stop being the final authority on what your life is for. To take up the cross, for the first hearers, meant one thing: a condemned man carrying the instrument of his own death through town. Jesus is asking for our lives, and He is honest about it up front.

Six days later He takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain and is transfigured before them: face like the sun, garments white as light, Moses and Elijah, the bright cloud, and the Father's voice: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matthew 17:5). The timing is the interpretation: one week after the cross was announced and rejected, glory is unveiled to three witnesses so that scandal of the cross will not break their faith when it comes. St. Leo's reading, below, is the classic. Notice Peter in the scene: "Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths." It is a lovable instinct and a wrong one: to freeze the glory, build on the summit, and skip the descent. The cloud interrupts him mid-sentence, and the Father's "listen to him" answers Peter's "God forbid" from the week before. The mountain is fuel for the road, not a substitute for it; they come down, and Jerusalem is still where the road goes.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Isaiah 53:3-6 (the live discovery text; do not preview it). The suffering servant: despised, rejected, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. Peter's "God forbid" collides not just with Jesus' prediction but with his own Scriptures. The Messiah who must suffer was already on the page; it was the page nobody wanted to read at the coronation.

Sinai behind the Transfiguration. Exodus 24:15-18 (the cloud covers the mountain, the glory of the LORD, Moses enters the cloud) and Exodus 34:29 (Moses' face shines from speaking with God). Matthew paints the mountain (traditionally identified as Tabor) with Sinai's palette: mountain, cloud, radiant face, terrified witnesses. Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, appear beside Jesus and then vanish, leaving "Jesus only."

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Leo the Great | *Sermon 51 (on the Transfiguration)*

St. Leo's reading of Tabor is the Church's classic: the great reason for the Transfiguration was to remove the scandal of the cross from the hearts of the disciples, so that the humiliation of the Passion, freely undertaken, would not shatter the faith of men who had been shown the hidden excellence of His dignity. Glory is unveiled for one week's worth of witnesses so that on the worst Friday in history, three men would carry a memory stronger than what their eyes were seeing.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

Preaching on the rebuke, St. Chrysostom marvels at the whiplash and refuses to soften it: the blessing and the "Satan" come from the same Lord to the same man within moments, because the

confession was from the Father and the correction was from the flesh. Peter's error wore the costume of devotion, wishing his Master well, and Chrysostom's warning lands on every generation: our affection for Christ, when it argues against His cross, stops being on God's side without ever feeling like betrayal.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) | *The Science of the Cross and final writings*

A philosopher, a Jewish convert, a Carmelite, and a martyr at Auschwitz, St. Teresa Benedicta gave her life to what she called the science of the cross: the truth that the cross is not an obstacle on the way to God but the way itself, and that we hand ourselves over to it not because suffering is good but because Love is hanging there. She wrote that one can only learn this science by coming to feel the cross's weight personally, and she signed her learning in blood. Her whole life answers Peter's "God forbid": the world is not saved by avoiding Golgotha.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 554-556:** The Transfiguration: a foretaste of the Kingdom given precisely after Peter's confession and the first prediction of the Passion, to strengthen the disciples for the scandal of the cross.
- CCC 618: The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, and He calls His disciples to take up their cross and follow Him, making them partners in His paschal mystery.
- CCC 2015: "The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle."
- **CCC 540:** Jesus' rejection of the tempter's shortcuts; the kingdom-without-the-cross proposal was made before, in the wilderness, and refused there too.

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND, LEADER ONLY)

MOVEMENT 4 OF THE KERYGMA: THE CROSS

There is no salvation without the cross. The kerygma's center is not that God is nice but that Christ died for our sins and was raised. Didactic texts: 1 Corinthians 1:18 (the word of the cross, folly to the perishing, power of God to the saved); Isaiah 53. And plant this quietly in your memory for the final session: 1 Peter 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." The man who said "God forbid" tonight will one day write the theology of the cross with his own pen. Say nothing; the group will find it in Session 12. Do not teach this strand aloud.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY, NEVER REVEAL)

- **The name whiplash.** Rock in verse 18, Satan in verse 23. The name thread takes its first hard swing. Track it silently.
- **“Listen to him.”** The Father's command on the mountain is the direct answer to Peter's “God forbid” in the valley. If a participant connects them, celebrate loudly.
- **The booth instinct.** Freezing glory to avoid descent will echo later; Peter's whole arc is learning to come down the mountain and walk to the cross. Say nothing.
- **Silence resolved.** Last week's “tell no one” now has its answer: the title needed the cross added to its definition first. Make sure the group closes that loop themselves in Question 1.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group resolves last session's cliffhanger: why Jesus silenced the confession.
2. The group names how the rock became a stumbling block: right title, self-written definition, a Christ without a cross.
3. The group discovers Isaiah 53 and articulates that the suffering Messiah was in the Scriptures all along.
4. The group states what deny yourself and take up your cross do and do not mean, concretely.
5. The group reads the Transfiguration through its timing: glory given to sustain the road to the cross, not to replace it.

TIME NOTE

Core session runs about 80 minutes; it carries two scenes. If long: cut the second Dig Deeper and compress Win to one question. **Do not cut** the Isaiah 53 discovery or the Send questions.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you set your face toward Jerusalem and called it necessary. We confess that we love your glory and flinch from your cross, and that we have often wished you well in ways that argued with your plan. Father, say to our hearts tonight what you said on the mountain: this is my beloved Son; listen to him. Give us ears for the whole Christ, crucified and risen. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Open questions; every answer is welcome.

W1. Tell us about a time someone you love made a choice you were sure was wrong, and you tried to talk them out of it. What was that like, and how did it turn out?

W2. What is the hardest thing anyone has ever asked of you where you said yes anyway? What made the yes possible?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Matthew 16:21-23

1. Verse 21 begins “From that time”: the moment they confess who He is, Jesus starts teaching what He came to do, and Matthew says He MUST go and suffer. First, close last week's loop: does this explain why He said “tell no one”? And what is the weight of that word “must”?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

It does close the loop: the title was true but the dictionary was wrong. A crowd hearing “Christ” would most likely hear conquest; popular hope ran heavily toward a triumphant royal deliverer; the disciples themselves still heard it that way, as Peter is about to prove. The confession had to be completed by the cross before it could be preached, which is why the curriculum changes the moment the confession is made. And the “must” (the Greek *dei*) is iron: the Passion is not a tragedy Jesus fails to dodge; it is the necessity He is deliberately walking toward. The cross is the plan, not the accident.

2. Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes Him: “God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” Be honest: is there anything wrong with what Peter wants? He loves his friend and doesn't want him tortured to death. So why does this earn the harshest words Jesus ever speaks to a disciple: “Get behind me, Satan”?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Nothing is wrong with the affection, and that is exactly what makes the moment terrifying: Peter's error wears the costume of devotion. But look at what his sentence actually does: it sets his plan for Jesus against the Father's plan, and a Messiah without a cross is precisely the proposal Satan made in the wilderness (all the kingdoms, no Calvary; see CCC 540). When Peter repeats the offer, Jesus names its true author. Note the word translated hindrance: *skandalon*, a stumbling stone. Five verses after becoming the rock the Church is built on, Peter is a rock in the road. Same man, same love; the difference is who gets to define the word Christ. And hear “Get behind me” precisely: it is not expulsion. Behind Jesus is where a disciple walks. He is ordering Peter out of the road and back into line.

3. Peter confessed the right title with the wrong definition, and he got the definition from “the things of men.” Where was the right definition available all along?

Live discovery: say: “Seven hundred years before this conversation, the definition was written down. Read Isaiah 53:3-6 in pairs. What kind of Messiah is on this page, and what does His suffering accomplish?” Let pairs report before the answer box.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The pairs should find the servant: despised, rejected, a man of sorrows; wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement that made us whole was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed; the LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all. Two discoveries matter here. First, the suffering Messiah is not a Christian retrofit; He was in Israel's own Scriptures, on the page nobody read at coronations. Second, and this is the session's center: the suffering is FOR us. Isaiah does not describe a martyrdom that merely inspires; he describes a substitution that heals. The cross Peter forbade is the very thing that saves Peter. That is why “God forbid” had to be answered so hard: he was, with the best intentions, forbidding his own salvation.

4. Then Jesus turns to everyone: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Two dangers: making this mean too little (my cross is slow traffic) or something toxic (God wants me to hate myself). What does it actually mean to deny yourself and take up a cross?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

To deny yourself is not to despise yourself; it is to dethrone yourself: to resign as the final authority on what your life is for, the same movement as “at your word” in the boat, now made permanent. And to take up a cross, in the first century, had exactly one meaning: a condemned man carrying the instrument of his own execution through town. Jesus is not asking for our inconveniences; He is asking for our lives, and He is honest about the price up front. Then the paradox that makes it good news rather than grim news: whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The self we cling to shrinks; the self we surrender He returns to us, larger and alive. Nobody in this room has ever met a bitter old saint who regrets having given Christ too much.

READ ALOUD: Matthew 17:1-8

5. Six days after the worst week of Peter's discipleship, Jesus takes him, James, and John up the mountain and unveils glory: the shining face, Moses and Elijah, the cloud, the voice. Why now? Look at what happened six days ago and ask what this vision is FOR.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The timing is the interpretation, and the Church has read it this way since St. Leo: one week after the cross was announced and rejected, glory is shown to three witnesses so that the scandal of the cross will not shatter their faith when it arrives (CCC 555-556 gathers this reading). The scenery is Sinai's: mountain, cloud, radiant face; the Law and the Prophets stand beside Jesus and then vanish, leaving “Jesus only.” And the Father's command is precisely aimed: “This is my beloved Son... listen

to him.” Listen to Him: including, especially, the part about Jerusalem and suffering that Peter refused to hear last week. The mountain does not cancel the road; it fuels it.

6. Peter, of course, has a plan: “Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths.” He wants to build on the summit and stay. What is right about that instinct, what is wrong with it, and where do you recognize it in yourself?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

What is right: he recognizes glory when he sees it and wants to remain with Christ; the instinct to stay near the Lord is the best thing in him. What is wrong: he wants to freeze the mountaintop and skip the descent, to keep the consolation and cancel the mission, and the cloud interrupts him mid-sentence. Every believer knows this instinct: to live retreat to retreat, high to high, treating the valley and the cross as the parts of discipleship God surely did not intend. But the Gospels are blunt: they came down the mountain, and the road still went to Jerusalem. Consolations are fuel, not destination. The group should name their own booths honestly; the leader may need to go first.

DIG DEEPER: GET BEHIND ME

The Greek is *hypage opisō mou*, go behind me. In Matthew 4:10 Jesus dismisses the tempter with “Begone, Satan”; here the command adds “behind me,” and the difference matters. The devil is sent away; Peter is sent back into formation, because behind the Master is precisely where a disciple belongs. The rebuke and the retention happen in the same breath: Jesus refuses Peter’s plan without refusing Peter.

DIG DEEPER: BOOTHS

Peter’s offer to build booths (*skēnai*, tents or tabernacles) likely reaches for the Feast of Booths, when Israel camped in shelters to remember the wilderness and to anticipate God dwelling with His people. The instinct is liturgically beautiful and chronologically wrong: the true tabernacled of God with man is standing in front of him, and it will be accomplished not by tents on a summit but by a body on a cross and an empty tomb. St. John will later say the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.

SEND: TAKING IT WITH YOU

S1. Where in your life right now are you saying “God forbid” to something Jesus has made fairly clear, defining for Him what your life as a Christian should cost? Name it to yourself honestly.

S2. What is one concrete act of self-denial you can take up this week, chosen not as self-improvement but as a deliberate step behind Jesus, letting Him lead and you follow?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray with Isaiah 53:3-6 once this week, slowly, replacing the pronouns: wounded for MY transgressions, bruised for MY iniquities. Stay until it stops being information.
2. Choose one real act of self-denial this week (something with a cost: time, comfort, preference, or pride) and offer it silently with the words “Behind you, Lord.”
3. When something good and consoling happens this week, enjoy it, thank God for it, and then deliberately ask: “What is this fuel FOR?” Come ready to share what you noticed.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, on the mountain you told us everything: this is your beloved Son, and we are to listen to him. Forgive us for the times we have edited His words to fit our comfort, and loved Him in ways that argued with His cross.

Lead us down the mountain behind Him, through the valley, wherever the road goes, until we see Him in glory with nothing to interrupt. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Matthew 16:24 (RSV2CE)

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 4; standing reminder about the sealed Session 1 sheet.

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Texts

- Matthew 16:21-23, the first Passion prediction, Peter's rebuke, “Get behind me, Satan”
- Matthew 16:24-28, deny yourself, take up your cross, lose your life to find it
- Matthew 17:1-8, the Transfiguration, the booths, “listen to him”

Live Discovery Text

- Isaiah 53:3-6, the suffering servant, wounded for our transgressions

Supporting Texts

- Matthew 4:8-10, the wilderness shortcut refused (kingdom without a cross)
- Exodus 24:15-18 and 34:29, Sinai: cloud, glory, shining face
- John 1:14, the Word tabernacled among us (Dig Deeper)

Way of Salvation Strand (leader only)

- 1 Corinthians 1:18, the word of the cross: power of God to the saved
- 1 Peter 2:24, he bore our sins in his body on the tree (plant; resolves Session 12)

Catechism

- CCC 554-556, the Transfiguration and its purpose
- CCC 618, taking up the cross and sharing in Christ's sacrifice
- CCC 2015, the way of perfection passes by way of the Cross
- CCC 540, the tempter's shortcut refused

Memory Verse

- Matthew 16:24

Take-Home 4: The Things of Men

Keep your Take-Home 1 sheet safe, with your written guess still folded. We will need it.

WHAT WE FOUND

“From that time”: the moment the confession was made, Jesus began teaching what the Christ came to do, and Matthew’s word is iron: he **MUST** go to Jerusalem and suffer. The cross is the plan, not the accident. And that solved last week’s cliffhanger: the title had to be completed by the cross before it could be preached. Peter, loving Jesus with the wrong dictionary, took Him aside: “God forbid, Lord!” and received the hardest words Jesus ever spoke to a friend: “Get behind me, Satan! ... you are not on the side of God, but of men” (Matthew 16:23). Five verses from rock to stumbling stone, and the difference was one move: confessing the right Christ, then trying to define Him ourselves. Yet “behind me” is not expulsion; behind Jesus is where a disciple walks. He ordered Peter out of the road and back into line.

We found the true definition where it had been waiting for seven centuries: Isaiah 53, the servant wounded for our transgressions, whose stripes heal us. The cross Peter forbade is the very thing that saves Peter. Then Jesus turned to all of us: deny yourself (dethrone yourself, not despise yourself) and take up your cross, and He was honest about the word’s weight. Six days later, the mountain: His face like the sun, Moses and Elijah, the cloud, and the Father’s voice answering Peter’s “God forbid” from the week before: “This is my beloved Son... listen to him.” Peter wanted to build booths and stay; the road still went down the mountain and on to Jerusalem. Glory is fuel for the road, not a substitute for it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Leo the Great / *Sermon 51 (on the Transfiguration)*

The great purpose of the Transfiguration was to remove the scandal of the cross from the disciples’ hearts: glory shown to three witnesses so that on the worst Friday in history they would carry a memory stronger than what their eyes were seeing.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom / *Homilies on St. Matthew, Homily 54*

The blessing and the “Satan” came from the same Lord to the same man within moments: the confession was from the Father, the correction from the flesh. Affection for Christ, when it argues against His cross, stops being on God’s side without ever feeling like betrayal.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) / *The Science of the Cross*

The cross is not an obstacle on the way to God but the way itself; we hand ourselves over to it not because suffering is good but because Love is hanging there. She learned that science personally and signed it in blood at Auschwitz.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray with Isaiah 53:3-6 once, slowly, replacing the pronouns: wounded for MY transgressions. Stay until it stops being information.
2. Choose one real act of self-denial this week, something with a cost, and offer it silently with the words "Behind you, Lord."
3. When something good and consoling happens this week, thank God, then ask: "What is this fuel FOR?"

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Matthew 16:24 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **John 6:51-71**. Watch what the crowd does at verse 66, and what Jesus does not do about it.

Catechism references from tonight: CCC 554-556, 618, 540.

Session 5: To Whom Shall We Go?

John 6:51-71 | 75 to 90 minutes | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group discovers the only recorded large-scale desertion of disciples over a teaching in Jesus' ministry, provoked by His Eucharistic teaching; that Jesus lets people leave rather than soften His words; and that Peter models the faith that stays: clinging to Christ's words before understanding them.

Catholic Touchstone: The Eucharist has been a stumbling block from the first hour it was announced; the Catechism itself places John 6:67 at the heart of its Eucharistic teaching (CCC 1336). Faith often says "I will stay with you" before it can say "I understand you," and that order is not a defect of faith but its shape.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This scene closes the Bread of Life discourse, the day after the feeding of the five thousand, in the synagogue at Capernaum. Read John 6:51-58 aloud yourself before the session and notice its trajectory: when the crowd balks at "the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh," Jesus does not spiritualize or soften. He intensifies: "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53), and John's Greek even shifts verbs as the discourse climaxes, from the ordinary *esthlein* to *trōgein*, a word that can carry a blunt physical sense (to gnaw, munch), a much-discussed detail whose force is debated. Whatever school of interpretation one comes from, the narrative fact is stark: the hearers understood Him to be saying something scandalous and literal enough to leave over, and He let them leave rather than call them back with "I only meant a metaphor."

Verse 66 is one of the saddest sentences in the Gospels: "After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him." Not the crowds: disciples. This is the only recorded large-scale departure of disciples over a teaching, and the teaching is the Eucharist. Then the question He turns on the Twelve, which the Church has never stopped hearing: "Will you also go away?" (John 6:67). He does not chase the leavers or renegotiate the teaching. Love that means anything permits leaving; the door He died to open, He refuses to lock behind anyone.

Peter's answer is the session's heart, and it must be read precisely: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). Notice what Peter does not say. He does not say "we understand the teaching";

nothing suggests the Twelve grasped the flesh-and-blood words any better than the deserters did. He says something better: we have nowhere better to be, because the words we cannot yet digest are the words of eternal life, and we know WHO is speaking. This is clinging faith: staying with the Person when the teaching is over your head, believing in order to understand rather than demanding to understand as the price of believing. And catch the order of Peter's words in verse 69: "we have believed, and have come to know." The word order alone proves nothing grammatically, but the Church, above all St. Augustine, has long heard in it the shape of faith: believing in order to understand.

The scene ends with a shadow: "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70). John names Judas. Staying bodily is not the same as staying in heart, a thread this study will pull hard later. Do not develop it tonight; let it sit.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Exodus 16:2-4, 11-15 (the live discovery text; do not preview it). Bread from heaven has a history, and so does grumbling at it. Israel "murmured" in the wilderness and received manna; the crowd in John 6 "murmured" at the true bread (John 6:41 uses the same note). Jesus Himself draws the line: your fathers ate the manna and died; this bread gives eternal life. The manna was real bread and a real gift, and it was also a rehearsal.

Joshua 24:15. "Choose this day whom you will serve." The Old Testament knows the moment Jesus creates in verse 67: a free people put on the spot, loved enough to be allowed to walk away.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Antioch | *Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 7 (c. 107 AD)*

Within living memory of the apostles, on his way to martyrdom, St. Ignatius wrote of certain teachers he warned the churches against: they abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, the flesh which suffered for our sins and which the Father raised. The scandal of John 6 was still dividing rooms seventy years later, and the apostolic churches were on the side of the hard saying.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine | *Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 27*

Preaching on this very desertion, St. Augustine turns Peter's answer into a rule for the life of faith: the deserters demanded to understand before they would believe, and so they left; Peter believed in order that he might understand, and so he stayed. For Augustine the sequence is everything: crede ut intelligas, believe that you may understand. The words that scandalize the mind from the outside feed it from the inside, but only staying gets you inside.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Alexandria | *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Book 4*

Commenting on the Bread of Life discourse, St. Cyril insists on the realism of the gift: the flesh of Christ is life-giving because it is the flesh of the Word who is Life, and by it He plants His own life in us, as fire spreads warmth into iron. Cyril has no patience with reducing the words to bare symbol; the scandal of the hearers, he notes, came from imagining cannibalism rather than sacrament, misunderstanding the mode, not overestimating the reality.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1336:** The first announcement of the Eucharist divided the disciples, just as the announcement of the Passion scandalized them; the Catechism quotes “Will you also go away?” and calls the Lord's question one that echoes through the ages, an invitation of His love to discover that He alone has the words of eternal life.
- **CCC 1374:** In the Eucharist, Christ is present truly, really, and substantially: body and blood, soul and divinity, the whole Christ.
- **CCC 162:** Faith is an entirely free gift that can be lost; to live, grow, and persevere in it to the end, we must nourish it with the word of God, beg the Lord to increase it, and let it work through charity, abound in hope, and be rooted in the faith of the Church. (For the Eucharist as the food that preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace, see CCC 1392 and 1394.)

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND, LEADER ONLY)

MOVEMENT 5 OF THE KERYGMA: FAITH THAT STAYS, AND THE FOOD THAT SUSTAINS IT

The kerygma calls for a response of faith, and tonight shows what that faith looks like when the teaching outruns the understanding: it clings to the Person. Didactic texts: John 6:68 itself; Psalm 34:8 (“taste and see that the LORD is good”: tasting precedes full seeing); Joshua 24:15. Quiet plant: salvation lands a person not in a private opinion but at a table; the study's final movements will make the Church and her Eucharist explicit. Do not teach this strand aloud.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY, NEVER REVEAL)

- **“To whom shall we go?” under pressure.** Peter's magnificent answer will be stress-tested in a courtyard later in this study. Fix his exact words in your memory; the group will need to recall them at the right moment, and it should be their discovery, not your reveal.
- **The Judas shadow.** Verses 70-71 introduce the betrayer within the Bread of Life discourse, the shadow that will later fall across the Eucharistic table itself. Staying bodily is not staying in heart. Let it sit unexplored tonight.

- **Bread thread.** Manna, Bread of Life, the breaking of the bread in Acts 2:42: the table runs the length of this study. Track silently.
- **Sealed guess.** Standing dismissal reminder only.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group names the narrative facts: the teaching, the desertion over it, and Jesus' refusal to soften it.
2. The group discovers the manna background and the murmuring echo in Exodus 16.
3. The group articulates Peter's model of clinging faith: staying with the Person before understanding the teaching, believing in order to understand.
4. Each participant locates their own hardest saying and chooses a Peter-shaped response to it.
5. Distribute Take-Home 5; standing sealed-sheet reminder.

TIME NOTE

Core session runs about 75 minutes. If long: cut the second Dig Deeper and one Win question. **Do not cut** the Exodus 16 discovery or the Send questions. Pastoral note: participants wrestling with Eucharistic faith may be quietly present; keep the tone of Question 6 warm and unhurried.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Bread of Life, you have words of eternal life, and some of them are hard. Give us tonight the honesty of the crowd, who at least admitted the saying was difficult, and the faith of Peter, who stayed anyway. Where our understanding runs out, let our trust keep walking. To whom else would we go? Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Open questions; every answer is welcome.

W1. Has anyone you trusted ever told you something you could not accept at first, and only later found out they were right? What kept you in the relationship in the meantime?

W2. What makes people walk away from things they once loved: jobs, friendships, faith? What, in your experience, makes people stay?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: John 6:51-58

1. Track the conversation's escalation. The crowd balks at “the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh,” and asks how. Look carefully at what Jesus does next: does He soften the saying, explain it as a metaphor, or something else?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

He intensifies it. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (6:53), and He repeats the point four more times, adding “my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.” John's Greek even shifts verbs as the discourse climaxes, to one that can mean to gnaw or chew, a detail many commentators find telling, though debated. The narrative facts are these: He repeats, intensifies, and lets people leave. When He does add a word about the Spirit, “It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail” (6:63), the Church has never read it as a retraction into metaphor but as naming how the gift is given: by the power of the Spirit, not by carving a corpse. As St. Cyril saw, the hearers erred about the mode, not by overestimating the reality. Jesus does not retract; He never says the crowd took Him too literally, the way He clarifies elsewhere when disciples misread a figure. The hard saying was meant to be hard.

2. The crowd “murmured” at Him about bread from heaven (6:41). That word has a history.

Live discovery: say: “This is not the first time Israel has grumbled about bread from heaven. Read Exodus 16:2-4 and 11-15 in pairs: what does God give, how do the people respond before and after, and what does the manna teach Israel?” Let pairs report before the answer box.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The pairs should find: a murmuring people in the wilderness, and a God who answers grumbling with bread from heaven, morning by morning, teaching Israel daily dependence (“that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law”). Jesus stands inside this story and draws the line Himself: “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died... he who eats this bread will live for ever” (6:49, 58). The manna was real bread and a real gift, and it was also a rehearsal: God has always fed His people on the way through the wilderness, and the true Bread has now come down. The murmuring is part of the pattern too: the gift of heaven has always been grumbled at before it was received.

READ ALOUD: John 6:60-71

3. Verse 66: “After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him.” Not curious crowds: disciples. This is the only time in Jesus' ministry that disciples walk away in numbers over something He taught. Sit with what triggered it. What does it tell us that THIS teaching, of everything He said, is the one people left over?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

It tells us the hearers knew He meant something enormous. Nobody abandons a beloved teacher over an obvious metaphor; they left because the words, taken as He kept insisting on them, demanded more than they could give. It also tells us something about Jesus: He watched disciples walk away and did not run after them with a softer version. The teaching was not negotiable, which means it was not decorative. And it should quietly recalibrate our expectations: if the Eucharist scandalized the people who heard it announced in person, we should not be surprised that it scandalizes now, nor conclude that scandal proves the teaching false. It has been the hard saying since the first afternoon (CCC 1336 says exactly this).

4. Then Jesus turns to the Twelve with one of the most vulnerable questions in Scripture: “Will you also go away?” He does not chase the deserters, and He puts the door in front of His closest friends. What kind of love asks that question?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Love that refuses to keep anyone by force or by dilution. He wants disciples, not hostages, and He would rather be abandoned than misrepresented. There is something here the group should hold onto for every hard saying they will ever meet: Jesus does not lock the door, lower the price, or pretend the teaching away. He asks a free question and waits for a free answer, the same freedom Joshua gave Israel: choose this day. Faith that could not have left is not faith.

5. Peter answers for the Twelve: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” Read it like a lawyer: what does Peter claim, and, just as important, what does he carefully NOT claim?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

He does not claim to understand the teaching. Nothing in the text suggests the Twelve grasped the flesh-and-blood words any better than the men walking home. What Peter claims is better and more honest: there is nowhere better to go, because the words we cannot yet digest are the words of eternal life, and we know who is speaking. This is clinging faith, and it is the session's treasure: staying with the Person when the teaching is over your head. Notice also the order of the verbs in verse 69: “we have believed, and have come to know.” Belief named first; knowledge following; an order the tradition, especially Augustine, has treasured as the shape of faith, even if the grammar alone cannot prove a sequence. The deserters found the saying too hard to accept and walked away; Peter, without claiming any better understanding, entrusted himself to the One speaking, and trust let him inside. Every believer eventually stands where Peter stands, holding some teaching they cannot yet metabolize; his sentence is the map for that day.

6. Bring it home before the shadow falls. The Church has heard “Will you also go away?” in every generation, usually standing exactly where the crowd stood: at the Eucharist, and at

the other hard sayings. What is YOUR hardest saying right now, and what would a Peter-shaped response to it look like this week?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Let this be unhurried and honest; the leader may need to name a hard saying of their own first. The Peter-shaped response has three moves the group can take away: name the difficulty honestly (the crowd's "this is a hard saying" was at least truthful); refuse the false ultimatum that says you must fully understand before you may stay; and re-anchor in the Person: "I do not yet understand this, but I know You, and You have never yet been wrong with me." Then stay close enough to keep listening: at the table, in the Scriptures, in the Church where the words are broken open.

Understanding tends to come to those who remain in the room. Close the question, then read verses 70-71 aloud without comment except one sentence: "John wants us to know that one man stayed in the room and was already gone. Hold that; we will need it."

DIG DEEPER: THE VERB THAT CHEWS

Through most of the discourse John uses the ordinary verb for eating (*esthien*). From verse 54 onward he switches to *trōgein*, a blunt, physical word: to gnaw, munch, chew. Many readers find it telling that the vocabulary gets more physical, not less, at the climax, though scholars debate how much weight the verb alone can bear. It is one thread among several (the desertion, the refusal to clarify, Ignatius' generation) that the Church reads together when she confesses the realism of the gift.

DIG DEEPER: CAPERNAUM

John 6:59 locates the discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum, Peter's adopted hometown, the town of his house and his mother-in-law and his boat. The hardest teaching was delivered on Peter's home turf, in front of his neighbors, and the mass desertion happened where everyone knew his name. Staying cost him socially before it ever cost him theologically. Ruins of that synagogue's successor, and of a first-century house venerated very early as Peter's, still stand there today.

SEND: TAKING IT WITH YOU

S1. "You have the words of eternal life." Where else, honestly, have you been going for words to live by (voices, feeds, philosophies)? What would it look like this week to route one of those needs back to Him?

S2. If Jesus asked you tonight, face to face, "Will you also go away?", what is your honest answer, and what is it based on: understanding, habit, or knowing Him?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Once this week, bring your hardest saying directly into prayer and say Peter's sentence over it, word for word: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Then sit in silence for five minutes.
2. If you are Catholic and able, go to one Mass this week on purpose (not obligation) and listen to the words of institution as the answer to John 6. If you are still exploring, read John 6:51-58 once more, slowly, and write down your honest questions; bring one to the leader or the group.
3. Notice this week when you are tempted to walk away from something good because it got difficult, and ask whether the difficulty is a wall or a door.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We bring you our hard sayings, our half-understandings, and our honest questions, and we choose tonight to stay. Feed us with yourself, strengthen what is weak in our faith, and keep us in the room until understanding comes. We have believed, and we have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

John 6:68 (RSV2CE)

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 5; standing reminder about the sealed Session 1 sheet.

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Texts

- John 6:51-58, the Bread of Life climax: flesh for the life of the world
- John 6:60-71, the hard saying, the desertion, "Will you also go away?", Peter's answer, the Judas shadow

Live Discovery Text

- Exodus 16:2-4, 11-15, murmuring and manna

Supporting Texts

- John 6:41, 49, the murmuring echo and the manna comparison
- Joshua 24:15, choose this day whom you will serve
- Psalm 34:8, taste and see (strand)

Catechism

- CCC 1336, the Eucharistic scandal and the Lord's question
- CCC 1374, the real presence
- CCC 162, persevering in faith

Memory Verse

- John 6:68

Take-Home 5: To Whom Shall We Go?

Keep your Take-Home 1 sheet safe, with your guess still folded inside. We will need it.

WHAT WE FOUND

In the synagogue at Capernaum, Jesus finished the Bread of Life discourse, and when the crowd balked at “the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh,” He did not soften; He intensified: “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). We traced the bread back to Exodus 16: a murmuring people, and a God who has always answered grumbling with bread from heaven. The manna was a rehearsal; the true Bread had come down.

Then the saddest verse: “After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him” (John 6:66), the only recorded desertion of disciples over a teaching in all the Gospels. He chased no one, softened nothing, and turned to the Twelve with the freest question love ever asked: “Will you also go away?” Peter’s answer is the treasure we carried out: he did not claim to understand the teaching; he claimed there was nowhere better to go: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Belief first, understanding following: faith that clings to the Person when the words are over our heads. The Church has been answering hard sayings with Peter’s sentence ever since.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Antioch | *Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 7 (c. 107 AD)*

Within living memory of the apostles, Ignatius warned against teachers who abstain from the Eucharist because they do not confess it to be the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ. The hard saying was still dividing rooms seventy years on, and the apostolic churches stood with it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine | *Tractates on John, Tractates 27 and 29*

The deserters demanded to understand before they would believe, and left; Peter believed in order that he might know, and stayed (Tractate 27, on John 6:69). Augustine distills the principle elsewhere in the same commentary: crede ut intelligas, believe that you may understand (Tractate 29). Only staying gets you inside the words.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Alexandria | *Commentary on John, Book 4*

The flesh of Christ is life-giving because it is the flesh of the Word who is Life; by it He plants His own life in us as fire spreads warmth into iron. The hearers' scandal came from imagining cannibalism rather than sacrament: they mistook the mode, not the reality.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Once this week, bring your hardest saying into prayer and say Peter's sentence over it, word for word: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Then five minutes of silence.
2. If you are Catholic and able, go to one Mass this week on purpose and listen to the words of institution as the answer to John 6. If you are still exploring, reread John 6:51-58 slowly and write down your honest questions; bring one back to the group.
3. Notice when you are tempted to walk away from something good because it got difficult, and ask whether the difficulty is a wall or a door.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

John 6:68 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **John 13:1-17 and 13:36-38**. Watch what Jesus does with a towel, and what Peter says he will do with his life.

Catechism references from tonight: CCC 1336, 1374, 162.

Session 6: Unless I Wash You

John 13:1-17, 36-38 and Luke 22:31-34 | 75 to 90 minutes | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group discovers that on the last night, salvation is enacted before it is explained: the Master washes feet, and the non-negotiable of discipleship is letting yourself be served by God. They watch Peter refuse, relent, boast, and hear his fall and his future predicted in a single sentence of intercession.

Catholic Touchstone: We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:10, 19); we are washed before we are sent. Grace received precedes every service rendered, and pride can refuse a gift while wearing humility's costume.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

John frames the scene with the widest lens in his Gospel: “when Jesus knew that his hour had come... having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And during supper... Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands... rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel” (John 13:1-4). Read the logic of those clauses carefully: it is precisely BECAUSE all things are in His hands that He picks up a towel. Omnipotence, given one evening to express itself, chooses the posture of the lowest household slave. Foot washing was so menial that some rabbis exempted even Jewish slaves from it. No one at that table would have washed another's feet; there was no one lower present to do it, until the Lord made Himself lower.

Peter's protest is the session's engine: “Lord, do you wash my feet? ... You shall never wash my feet” (John 13:6, 8). It sounds like humility, and it works as pride in humility's costume: Peter is still deciding what the Master may and may not do, still editing the plan, the same reflex as “God forbid.” He will serve Jesus gladly; what he cannot bear is being served, because receiving puts you on the low side of the exchange with nothing to offer back. Jesus' reply is one of the non-negotiables of the Gospel: “If I do not wash you, you have no part in me” (John 13:8). There is no version of Christianity in which we skip being cleansed and proceed directly to being useful. Salvation begins with a gift that can only be received, and the man too proud to receive it, however devout his refusal sounds, has no part in Him. Peter, hearing the stakes, swings to the other extreme with all his lovable excess: “not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”

Then two predictions land within minutes of each other, and your group should feel their proximity. In John, Peter asks “Lord, where are you going?” and Jesus answers, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward” (John 13:36), and Peter boasts: “I will lay down my life for you,” drawing the terrible reply about the cock. In Luke’s account of the same night, Jesus says: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:31-32). Parse the pronouns with the group, because English hides them: “demanded to have you” is plural (all of you), “I have prayed for you” is singular (you, Simon). Satan asks for the group; Jesus intercedes by name for the one who will fall hardest. And notice what the sentence contains: the fall (“when you have turned again” assumes a turning away), the return (not if but when), and the mission after the return (“strengthen your brethren”). Peter’s collapse, recovery, and life’s work are all inside Jesus’ prayer before any of it happens. Nothing that is coming will catch Jesus by surprise, and nothing that is coming is outside His intercession.

Also note the address: “Simon, Simon.” Not Peter, though three verses later Jesus does say “I tell you, Peter” (22:34). The doubled old name at the hour of sifting is a resonance worth savoring: the name thread your group has been walking since Session 1 bends here; track it silently as a suggestive echo rather than a settled meaning.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Exodus 29:4 and 40:12-13 (the live discovery text; do not preview it). At the ordination of Aaron and his sons, the first act is washing: “you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the tent of meeting, and wash them with water,” then vest them and consecrate them for priestly service. The Fathers and the Church’s liturgical instinct have long cherished the echo: on the night He instituted the Eucharist and commanded its repetition, Jesus began by washing the men He was consecrating. Present it as the Church’s cherished spiritual reading of the scene alongside the plain sense (the example of humble service, which Jesus Himself draws out in 13:12-17); the readings feed each other.

Genesis 18:4 and the custom. Water for the feet of guests was the first gesture of ancient hospitality, offered by Abraham to his three visitors. It was customarily provided: guests washed their own feet, or a servant did it; the host himself did not stoop to the task. Jesus takes the servant’s place at His own table.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine / *Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 56*

On Peter’s “You shall never wash my feet,” St. Augustine refuses to let the protest pass as virtue: Peter, in terror at the sight of his Lord at his feet, was preferring his own sense of propriety to his Master’s declared will, and the Lord’s answer shows that the washing was no mere courtesy but a matter of having part in Him. For Augustine the scene teaches the order of the Gospel itself: we must be cleansed by Christ before we can belong to Christ, and the refusal of the gift, however reverent it sounds, is the one thing that separates.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom / *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John, Homily 70*

St. Chrysostom lingers on the evangelist's framing: knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, He washed feet. The full consciousness of His dignity did not compete with the towel; it produced it. Chrysostom presses the point on his hearers: our excuses for withholding lowly service all appeal to dignity, and the Lord of all has taken that appeal away from us forever. Greatness in His kingdom stoops.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Bernard of Clairvaux / *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*

St. Bernard's classic anatomy of pride teaches that humility is truth, the honest acceptance of what we are before God, and that pride takes subtle, even self-deprecating forms; it does not always strut. Applying his teaching to Peter's protest, we may say: pride can bow, refuse gifts, and insist on its own unworthiness, because what it cannot surrender is control of the exchange. In Bernard's spirit: the soul that will not be served by God is not humble; it is still negotiating.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1337:** On the night He was betrayed, in order to leave His disciples a pledge of His love and never depart from His own, Christ washed their feet and instituted the Eucharist; the Catechism binds the towel and the table in a single paragraph.
- **CCC 1823:** Jesus makes charity the new commandment, loving as He has loved us, to the end; the foot washing is that love enacted hours before it is crucified.
- **CCC 2011:** Our merits are themselves God's gifts; everything we give Him, He gave first. The washed hands are the only hands that can serve.

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND, LEADER ONLY)

MOVEMENT 6 OF THE KERYGMA: RECEIVING BEFORE GIVING

Salvation must be received before it can be imitated. The kerygma is not first a program for our generosity; it is news of His. Didactic texts: 1 John 4:10 (“not that we loved God but that he loved us”) and 4:19; Titus 3:5 (“he saved us... by the washing of regeneration”, a baptismal note that will bloom in Session 10). Two quiet plants for later, leader only: “you shall follow afterward” (John 13:36) resolves in the final session; “when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:32) resolves at the end of the study in Peter's own letters. Say nothing. Do not teach this strand aloud.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY, NEVER REVEAL)

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- **“Simon, Simon.”** The old name, doubled, at the hour of sifting. The name thread bends here; track it silently.
 - **“You shall follow afterward.”** John 13:36 is a loaded promise with a long fuse; it resolves in Session 12. If anyone asks what “afterward” means, smile and say the study will answer it.
 - **The intercession sentence.** Luke 22:32 contains Peter’s fall, return, and mission in advance. The group must have this verse firmly in memory before Session 7; the discussion guide plants it hard on purpose.
 - **The boast.** “I will lay down my life for you” meets the servant girl in the next session. Say nothing.
 - **Sifting and fire.** Sifting wheat and refining silver (next session’s Zechariah discovery) are cousin images: the ordeal that separates and purifies. Do not connect them aloud; the group will.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group articulates the logic of John 13:3-4: omnipotence expressing itself as service, and love to the end enacted before it is explained.
2. The group names Peter’s refusal as pride in humility’s costume and states the non-negotiable: we must let Christ wash us to have part in Him.
3. The group discovers the priestly washing of Exodus 29 and 40 and receives the Church’s cherished reading of the scene.
4. The group parses Luke 22:31-32 (plural and singular, fall, return, and mission foretold) and carries the verse out memorized in substance.
5. Distribute Take-Home 6; standing sealed-sheet reminder.

TIME NOTE

Core session runs about 80 minutes; it carries two texts. If long: cut the second Dig Deeper and one Win question. **Do not cut** the Exodus discovery, Question 6, or the Send questions.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, on the night you were betrayed, you loved your own to the end, and you began by kneeling. Teach us tonight what Peter had to learn at your feet: that before we can give you anything, we must let

you give to us. Wash what is unclean in us, warm what is cold, and bend what is proud, and do not let our refusals, even the reverent ones, keep us from having part in you. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Open questions; every answer is welcome.

W1. Which is harder for you, honestly: giving help or receiving it? Tell us about a time someone tried to do something kind for you and you resisted.

W2. Who is the greatest person you have ever seen do a genuinely menial task? What did watching it do to you?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: John 13:1-11

1. Read verses 3 and 4 as one sentence: “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands... rose from supper... and girded himself with a towel.” John connects total power to the towel with a straight line. What is he telling us about God?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

That omnipotence, given one evening to express itself freely, chose the posture of the lowest household slave. The washing of feet was so menial that no one at that table would have done it for another; there was no servant present low enough, until the Lord made Himself the lowest. John is not showing us power condescending to a photo opportunity; he is showing us what the power of God is actually like when it is fully itself: it kneels, it serves, it loves “to the end.” Hours later the same logic will be nailed up in public. The towel is the cross in miniature, and both answer the question this study has been circling since the boat: what kind of Lord is this?

2. Peter's protest: “You shall never wash my feet.” Be careful before you grade it: it sounds humble. Is it? What is Peter actually refusing, and where have we seen this reflex in him before?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Beneath its reverent surface it works as pride in humility's costume: real awe may be present (Augustine hears terror in it), but Peter is still deciding what the Master may do. Peter will happily serve Jesus, fight for Jesus, die for Jesus (he says so within the hour); what he cannot bear is to be served, because receiving puts him on the low side of the exchange with nothing to offer back. And underneath the reverent words, notice who is still deciding what the Master may do: “never” is the vocabulary of “God forbid” (Session 4) wearing an apron. The group should sit with how precisely this diagnoses religious people: we would often rather exhaust ourselves for God than let Him love us, because service leaves our self-sufficiency intact and receiving does not. Bernard's principle that

humility is truth cuts here: the soul that will not be served by God is not humble; it is still negotiating.

3. Jesus' answer leaves no room: "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me." Weigh every word. Why is letting Him wash us not optional, and what does Peter's swing to the other extreme ("not my feet only but also my hands and my head!") get right and wrong?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Because the Gospel's order cannot be reversed: cleansing precedes belonging, gift precedes task, His service to us precedes all our service to Him. A Christianity that skips being washed and proceeds directly to being useful is not Christianity; it is self-salvation in a volunteer's vest. "No part in me" is as stark as "you have no life in you" from John 6, and it should be allowed to land with its full weight: the one thing that can keep a devout man out is refusing the gift. Peter's swing to hands and head gets the heart right (better everything than exclusion) and the mode wrong: he is still trying to manage the transaction, now by maximizing it. Jesus' calm reply ("he who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet") says: receive what I am giving, in the measure I am giving it. Grace is not improved by our seizing the ladle.

4. This washing happens on the same night, at the same table, where Jesus institutes the Eucharist and tells these men, "Do this in remembrance of me." Israel had seen an evening like this before: men washed with water at the door of the tent of meeting, on the day of their consecration.

Live discovery: say: "Read Exodus 29:1, 4 and Exodus 40:12-13 in pairs: who is washed, by whom, when, and for what purpose?" Let pairs report before the answer box.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The pairs should find: Aaron and his sons, brought to the door of the tent of meeting and washed with water as the first act of their ordination, then vested and anointed "that they may serve me as priests." The washing was the threshold of priesthood. The Church has long cherished the echo: on the night Jesus gave His apostles the Eucharist and the command to repeat it, He began by washing the men He was consecrating for that service. Offer this as the Church's treasured spiritual reading standing alongside the plain sense Jesus Himself draws out ("I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you," 13:15); the two readings feed each other rather than compete. Either way, the order holds for every disciple: washed first, then sent to serve.

READ ALOUD: Luke 22:31-34, then John 13:36-38

5. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." English hides something here: the first "you" is plural, the second is singular. Unpack this sentence like it is the most important thing said at the table, because for Peter it may be. What is in it?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Four things, and the group should find all four. First, the request: Satan has asked for all of them (plural), as he once asked for Job; the sifting is real and permitted. Second, the intercession: Jesus has prayed for Simon by name (singular), the one who will fall hardest, before the fall. Third, the fall itself, hidden in plain sight: “when you have turned again” assumes a turning away; Jesus knows, and says so without drama. Fourth, the future on the far side: not “if you recover” but “when,” and a mission waiting there: “strengthen your brethren.” Peter’s collapse, return, and life’s work are all inside Jesus’ prayer before any of it happens. Have the group say the verse back in their own words until its substance is memorized; they will need it soon, and they should also notice the address: “Simon, Simon,” the old name doubled with tenderness at the hour of sifting, an echo worth noticing.

6. Peter answers the warning with a boast: “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death”; in John, “I will lay down my life for you.” And Jesus tells him about the cock. Here is tonight’s hardest question: Peter is completely sincere. So what is the difference between sincerity and strength, and how does a person tell, in themselves, which one they are running on?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Peter means every word, and that is precisely the trap: sincerity measures the temperature of this moment’s feelings; strength is what remains at three in the morning, in the cold, when the feelings have gone home. Peter’s boast is built on self-knowledge (“I am ready”), and his self-knowledge is wrong; Jesus’ knowledge of him is right and is, notably, more merciful than Peter’s, since it comes wrapped in intercession and a guaranteed return. The diagnostic for the group: presumption talks about what I will do for God; dependence asks what God must do in me. “Though they all fall away, I will never” is presumption’s grammar (comparison plus self-confidence). “I have prayed for you” is the only ground that holds. Do not resolve the tension further tonight; tell the group plainly: “We follow Peter into the dark next week. Come.”

7. One more exchange before we leave the table. Peter asks, “Lord, where are you going?” and Jesus answers: “Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward.” What is Jesus promising Peter in that strange word “afterward”?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Keep this answer short and let it stay mysterious, because the study will collect on it later. At minimum: Jesus is going somewhere Peter, tonight, in his present strength, cannot go (the group now knows why: the boast is about to break). But “you shall follow afterward” is a promise, not a consolation prize: there will come a day when Peter can and will follow all the way. File the question and the promise away word for word: “Lord, where are you going?” and “you shall follow afterward.” This study is not done with them.

DIG DEEPER: THE TOWEL

The Greek says Jesus “girded himself” (*diezōsen*) with the towel: tied it on, the working dress of a slave at task. Keep the picture; it will matter later in the study that this scene printed itself on Peter’s memory, apron and all. For now, notice only that God tied on work clothes to save the world.

DIG DEEPER: SIFTED LIKE WHEAT

Sifting is violent: the grain is shaken, tossed, and torn from its husk so that what is wheat and what is chaff can finally be told apart. Satan’s request (the verb suggests demanding someone be handed over, as in Job’s story) is to shake the Twelve until they come apart. Jesus does not say the sifting is cancelled; He says the faith of the sifted man will not finally fail, because Someone is praying. The Church has read Luke 22:32 as bearing also on Peter’s office of strengthening the brethren; tonight, let it bear on his soul, and on ours: the ordeal is permitted, bounded, and prayed through.

SEND: TAKING IT WITH YOU

S1. Where, concretely, have you been refusing to let Christ (or anyone) serve you: in prayer, in the sacraments, in accepting help, in being loved without earning it? What would it cost your pride to say yes?

S2. Whose feet, figuratively or literally, is Jesus handing you the towel for this week: someone it would genuinely lower you to serve? Name them to yourself.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Once this week, deliberately receive: let someone do something for you without deflecting, repaying, or minimizing it, and receive it as practice for grace. If you are Catholic and it has been a while, consider letting Him wash you in Confession, where the Lord who knelt with the towel still cleanses His own.
2. Do one act of genuinely menial service, the kind with no audience and no credit, and do it as apprenticeship to the towel.
3. Memorize the substance of Luke 22:32 (“I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren”). Carry it into next week; you will need it.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, who knelt with a towel on the night we betrayed you: wash us, or we have no part in you. We surrender the pride that would rather serve than be loved, and the boasts we have made in our own strength. You have prayed for us that our faith may not fail; hold us to that prayer this week, and when we have turned again, make us a strength to our brothers and sisters. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"If I do not wash you, you have no part in me."

John 13:8 (RSV2CE)

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 6; standing reminder about the sealed Session 1 sheet. Next week goes into the dark with Peter; encourage everyone to be there.

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Texts

- John 13:1-11, the towel, the protest, "no part in me"
- John 13:12-17, the example drawn out (read if time allows)
- Luke 22:31-34, Simon, Simon; the sifting; the intercession; the boast
- John 13:36-38, "where are you going"; "you shall follow afterward"; the cock

Live Discovery Texts

- Exodus 29:1, 4 and Exodus 40:12-13, washing at the threshold of priesthood

Supporting Texts

- Genesis 18:4, water for the feet: the grammar of hospitality
- Job 1:6-12, Satan's request to sift a righteous man (background to Luke 22:31)
- 1 John 4:10, 19, He loved us first (strand)
- Titus 3:5, the washing of regeneration (strand; blooms in Session 10)

Catechism

- CCC 1337, the towel and the table bound together
- CCC 1823, love to the end as the new commandment
- CCC 2011, our merits are His gifts

Memory Verse

- John 13:8, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me."

Take-Home 6: Unless I Wash You

Keep your Take-Home 1 sheet safe, guesses still folded. We will need it.

WHAT WE FOUND

On the night He was betrayed, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, Jesus rose from supper, tied on a slave's towel, and washed His disciples' feet: omnipotence, free for one evening to express itself, chose the lowest task at the table. Peter refused: "You shall never wash my feet." It sounded humble; but as the Fathers heard it, it was pride in humility's costume, still deciding what the Master may do, still preferring to serve rather than be served. And Jesus' answer was a non-negotiable: "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me" (John 13:8). The Gospel's order cannot be reversed: washed first, then sent. We traced the water back to Exodus 29 and 40, where washing was the first act of priestly ordination, and heard the Church's cherished reading: on the night of the Eucharist, He washed the men He was consecrating.

Then, at the same table, one sentence carrying a whole future: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). Satan asked for all of them; Jesus prayed for Simon by name. The sentence holds a fall ("when you have turned again"), a guaranteed return (when, not if), and a mission on the far side. Peter answered with a boast, "I will lay down my life for you," and learned about the cock. Sincerity measures tonight's feelings; strength is what remains at three in the morning. And one strange promise to keep in your pocket: "Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward" (John 13:36).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine / *Tractates on John, Tractate 56*

Peter's protest preferred his own sense of propriety to his Master's declared will; the washing was no courtesy but a matter of having part in Him. We must be cleansed by Christ before we can belong to Christ, and refusing the gift, however reverent it sounds, is the one thing that separates.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom / *Homilies on John, Homily 70*

Knowing that all things were in His hands, He washed feet: the full consciousness of His dignity did not compete with the towel; it produced it. Our excuses for withholding lowly service all appeal to dignity, and the Lord of all has taken that appeal away forever.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Bernard of Clairvaux / *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*

Pride does not always strut; it can bow, refuse gifts, and insist on its own unworthiness, because what it cannot surrender is control of the exchange. The soul that will not be served by God is not humble; it is still negotiating.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Once this week, deliberately receive: let someone do something for you without deflecting, repaying, or minimizing it. If you are Catholic and it has been a while, consider letting Him wash you in Confession, where His cleansing in this scene reaches you sacramentally, again and again.
2. Do one act of genuinely menial service, the kind with no audience and no credit, as apprenticeship to the towel.
3. Memorize the substance of Luke 22:32: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." Carry it into next week.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"If I do not wash you, you have no part in me."

John 13:8 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read Luke 22:54-62, slowly. Next session matters; please be there.

Catechism references from tonight: CCC 1337, 1823, 2011.

Session 7: The First Charcoal Fire

Luke 22:54-62 and John 18:15-18, 25-27 | 75 to 90 minutes | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group walks with Peter into his worst hour and discovers how a sincere man falls: by degrees, at a distance, warming himself in the wrong company, ambushed by small tests after passing large ones. They discover that the fall was foretold inside a promise of refining and reunion, and they meet the look of Christ that breaks a heart open rather than breaking it.

Catholic Touchstone: “Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). Even the redeemed can fall, and presumption is the usual door. But the Catechism reads this very night as the anatomy of conversion: Jesus' look of infinite mercy drew tears of repentance from Peter (CCC 1429). The look that catches us in sin is the same look that refuses to let us go.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Lead this session gently. Statistically, someone at your table is carrying a denial of their own, recent or ancient, and tonight will find it. The goal is not to make anyone feel Peter's shame; it is to walk everyone through Peter's shame to the look that answers it. Keep the room unhurried and merciful.

The fall happens by degrees, and the degrees are the lesson. First, Gethsemane: Peter, told to watch and pray lest he enter into temptation, sleeps (Mark 14:37-38; cf. Luke 22:45-46); the battle was lost in the garden before it was fought in the courtyard. Second, the flash of the old boldness: Peter draws a sword and strikes (John 18:10 names him); he really was ready to die fighting. But the test that came was not the test he had rehearsed. Third, the distance: “Peter followed at a distance” (Luke 22:54), braver than the men who fled outright, and that partial courage carries him into the danger zone with his strength already spent. Fourth, the fire: it was cold, and the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, and “Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself” (John 18:18). Note St. John's specific word: *anthrakia*, a charcoal fire. Say nothing about it beyond what the session needs; simply make sure the group sees it and smells it. Comfort in the wrong company, at the wrong fire, is the posture of the fall.

Then the ambush. Not a soldier, not the high priest: a servant girl at the gate, glancing at his face in the firelight. “This man also was with him.” And the man who drew a sword against a detachment of troops folds before a girl: “Woman, I do not know him” (Luke 22:57). The denials escalate; in Matthew's account the second comes with an oath and the third with a curse invoked on himself (Matthew 26:72,

74). Sin compounds; each denial makes the next one cheaper, and by the third he is spending words he could not have imagined an hour before. Then the cock crows, “and the Lord turned and looked at Peter” (Luke 22:61), a detail only Luke preserves. No word is spoken. Peter “remembered the word of the Lord... and he went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:61-62). Everything now hangs on what kind of look that was and what kind of weeping follows it, and the session deliberately leaves that question half-open: it is next week's entire subject. Resist the urge to resolve it tonight; end in the dark with Peter, held only by Luke 22:32.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Zechariah 13:7-9 (the live discovery text; do not preview it). Hours before the courtyard, Jesus quoted Zechariah to the Eleven: “You will all fall away because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee” (Matthew 26:31-32). The group will read the Zechariah oracle itself and discover what stands directly after the striking and scattering: “I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them” (Zechariah 13:9). The scattering is not the end of the oracle; refining and reunion are inside it, and Jesus attached a Galilee appointment to the prophecy before anyone fell.

Psalm 51. David's Miserere is the vocabulary of the broken heart that God will not despise; verse 17 is tonight's memory verse and the only safe ground to end on.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose of Milan / *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke, Book X*

On Peter's weeping, St. Ambrose is the Church's tenderest reader: he finds no recorded words of Peter's repentance, no speech, no formula, only tears, and he treats the tears as sufficient: what words could not dare to confess, weeping confessed, and the tears washed the fault that the voice could not bring itself to name. For Ambrose, Peter's tears are the model of compunction: grief that flows toward the wounded Lord rather than away from Him, and is itself received as prayer.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom / *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew, Homily 85*

St. Chrysostom refuses to let his hearers sneer at Peter, and he names the mechanics of the fall with a physician's precision: the boast had leaned on self, sleep had disarmed prayer, and the fear of a little servant girl accomplished what armed men could not, so that Peter might learn, and we through him, the measure of human weakness left to itself. Yet Chrysostom will not end in the wound: the fall of the chief of the apostles was permitted, he says, so that no sinner after him need ever despair of the remedy.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Francis de Sales | Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III, Chapter 9 (“On Gentleness towards Ourselves”)

The gentle Doctor's counsel for the morning after every fall could have been written at this fire: when we have fallen, we must not fall also into bitter, anxious rage against ourselves, for that second fall, wounded pride disguised as contrition, serves no one but the enemy. Rise quickly, quietly, without amazement that weakness proved weak; grieve before God with a grief that is calm, full of hope, and set to work again. This is the constant theme of his spiritual direction: our falls, met this way, teach us two things at once, a just distrust of ourselves and a whole trust in God.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1429:** The Catechism reads this very scene as the pattern of interior conversion: St. Peter's conversion after his denial; Jesus' look of infinite mercy drawing tears of repentance, and, after the resurrection, the threefold affirmation of love. Tonight the group lives the first half of that sentence.
- **CCC 1851:** In the Passion, sin shows its every face, and the Catechism's list includes Peter's denial: our sins were present at the trial of Jesus, and they were what His mercy came for.
- **CCC 1451:** Contrition: sorrow of soul and detestation of sin, with the resolution not to sin again. Peter's bitter weeping is contrition before it has words.

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND, LEADER ONLY)

MOVEMENT 7 OF THE KERYGMA: THE DEPTH OF SIN, EVEN IN THE REDEEMED

The kerygma tells the truth about sin, and tonight the truth is that disciples fall. Didactic texts: 1 Corinthians 10:12 (let him who thinks he stands take heed); Proverbs 16:18 (pride before the fall). The pastoral center: sin's gravity and mercy's greater gravity must be held together, and tonight deliberately ends with the question of which weeping saves, unresolved, so that next session can answer it with the whole weight of the Gospel. Do not resolve it early; the ache is doing the teaching. Do not teach this strand aloud.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY, NEVER REVEAL)

- **The charcoal fire.** John's word anthrakia. Make certain the group registers the fire vividly (Question 3 does this), and say ABSOLUTELY NOTHING more about it. This is the study's longest fuse and its detonation belongs entirely to the group, two sessions from now.
- **The pattern replayed at scale.** Bold start, wavering attention, collapse, and (coming) cry and rescue: the walking-on-water rhythm from Session 2, life-sized. If a participant sees it, celebrate; do not point it out yourself.

- **Luke 22:32 is the floor.** The group memorized it last week for this exact night. The discussion guide has them stand on it at the end.
- **Galilee.** “I will go before you to Galilee” (Matthew 26:32) is the appointment mercy made before the fall. It resolves across the next two sessions. Say nothing.
- **Sealed guess.** Standing dismissal reminder; two sessions from now they must BRING the sheet.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group traces the anatomy of the fall by degrees: prayerlessness, the wrong test, the distance, the fire, the ambush, the compounding.
2. The group discovers Zechariah 13:7-9 and finds refining and reunion inside the very oracle of the scattering.
3. The group encounters the look of Christ (Luke 22:61) and begins, without resolving it, the question of the two kinds of weeping.
4. Each participant identifies their own “distance and fire”: where partial courage and wrong comfort put them in the danger zone.
5. Distribute Take-Home 7; the room ends held by Luke 22:32.

TIME NOTE

Core session runs about 75 minutes. If long: cut one Win question and the second Dig Deeper. **Do not cut** the Zechariah discovery or Question 6; and do not rush the silence after the look. This session should end quietly, a few minutes early if anything.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, tonight we follow at a distance with Simon, into the cold courtyard, to the fire where he warmed himself among your enemies. We do not come to judge him; we know the way too well. You prayed for him that his faith would not fail; pray for us. And when the cock crows over our own denials, turn and look at us, Lord, with the look that breaks hearts open and not apart. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Open questions; every answer is welcome. Keep the tone gentle tonight.

W1. Have you ever prepared hard for one test and then been ambushed by a completely different one? What happened?

W2. What is easier for you: a big dramatic act of courage, or small unglamorous faithfulness when nobody is watching? Why do you think that is?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Luke 22:54-62 (ask the room for slow, unhurried reading)

1. Before the courtyard, rewind two hours. In Gethsemane, Jesus found Peter sleeping and said to him, “Simon, are you asleep?... Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Mark 14:37-38; cf. Luke 22:45-46). Then when the soldiers came, Peter drew a sword and struck (John names him, 18:10). Put those two facts side by side: asleep in prayer, awake with a sword. What do they tell us about the test Peter had prepared for versus the test that came?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Peter had rehearsed dying in battle: the blaze of loyalty, the drawn sword, the glorious end, and he was genuinely ready for that test. He passed it, in fact, for about one swing. But the battle was lost earlier, in the garden, where the weapon that mattered was prayer and he slept through the armory. The test that actually came was not glory but attrition: cold, tired, anonymous hours where courage has no adrenaline to run on. The group should hold this diagnostic all night: we usually fall not at the test we feared but at the one we never thought to pray about, and prayerlessness today is the quiet first act of tomorrow's denial.

2. Verse 54: “Peter followed at a distance.” Give him his due: most of the others fled outright (John 18:15 tells of one other disciple who also followed); Peter turned back toward the danger. So what is “at a distance”: courage, or the beginning of the fall, or both?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Both, and that is what makes it so recognizable. Peter's love is real: it drags him toward the danger everyone else fled. But it is love operating at the range where he hopes to stay connected without being identified, close enough to watch, far enough to be safe. And partial courage is uniquely dangerous: it carries a man into the enemy's courtyard with his strength already spent and his identity already half-hidden. Most of us do not abandon Christ outright; we follow at a distance: believing quietly, editing ourselves in the wrong rooms, keeping the connection but managing the exposure. Tonight shows where the distance leads if it is not closed.

3. Read John's detail: it was cold, and the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, “and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself” (John 18:18). Paint the scene with your senses for a moment: the dark, the cold, the smell of charcoal, the firelight

on faces. What is wrong with this picture, and why does an evangelist writing decades later remember the fire so specifically?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

What is wrong: Peter is warming himself at the enemies' fire, taking comfort from the company of the people arresting his Lord, his face lit by their light. Nobody plans a denial; we drift into the geography of one: cold and tired, we accept warmth wherever it is offered, and comfort in the wrong company quietly recalibrates what we are willing to say when asked. As for why John remembers the fire so precisely: eyewitnesses remember sensory details from the worst nights of the people they love, and the "other disciple" who was in that courtyard (18:15-16) has been identified by tradition as John himself. Leave it exactly there. Let the group see the fire, smell it, and move on.

4. Now the ambush. Not a soldier with a sword, which Peter was ready for: a servant girl at the gate, glancing at his face. "I do not know him." Then again, with an oath. Then a third time, invoking a curse on himself (Matthew 26:72-74). Two questions: why does the man who attacked an armed detachment fold before a girl at a fire? And what do you notice about the escalation from first denial to third?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

He folds because this is the test he never rehearsed and because everything that made the sword possible (adrenaline, momentum, the Master standing beside him) is gone; what is left is a cold, exhausted, isolated man ambushed by a casual question, and sincerity without prayer has exactly that much endurance. The escalation is the second lesson: sin compounds. The first denial is a reflex; the second must shout down the first with an oath; the third spends a self-curse he could not have imagined an hour earlier. Each lie makes the next one cheaper, because each one deepens the identity being protected: by the third, Peter is no longer hiding a fact, he is defending a self he has invented at the fire. This is how ordinary people arrive at words and acts they would have sworn, sincerely, they were incapable of. Nobody should leave tonight feeling superior to Peter; the honest response is recognition.

5. Here is the strangest mercy in this story: Jesus predicted all of it, hours earlier, with a prophecy attached: "You will all fall away... for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee" (Matthew 26:31-32). He was quoting a specific oracle.

Live discovery: say: "Read Zechariah 13:7-9 in pairs. Find the line Jesus quoted, and then read what the oracle says happens AFTER the striking and the scattering. What is inside this prophecy besides the fall?" Let pairs report before the answer box.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The pairs should find that the scattering is not the oracle's last word. Immediately after the shepherd is struck and the sheep scattered: "I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as

one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The LORD is my God'" (Zechariah 13:9). The fall was foretold inside a promise: the fire is a refiner's fire, the ordeal has a purpose and a boundary, and reunion is written into the same sentence as the scattering. And Jesus added His own appointment to it before anyone fell: "I will go before you to Galilee." Mercy scheduled the reunion in advance. The group should feel the size of this: Peter's worst night was never outside the plan, never beyond the prayer of Luke 22:32, and never the end of his story. Neither is anyone's at this table.

6. The cock crows. "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter" (Luke 22:61), a detail only Luke preserves. No word is spoken; Jesus is on trial a courtyard away, and their eyes meet over the fire. Peter remembers, goes out, and weeps bitterly. Sit with the look before you analyze it: what kind of look do you think it was? What kinds of look could it NOT have been, given everything this study has shown us about Jesus and this man?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Let the group offer answers slowly; do not rush past the silence this question creates. What it could not have been: surprise (He predicted this, to the hour and the rooster); contempt or dismissal (He had just prayed for this exact man's faith not to fail, and attached a Galilee appointment to the prophecy of the fall). What Luke shows is a look that carries the memory of a word ("Peter remembered the word of the Lord"): the look reminds him of everything, the warning and the intercession together, and it is the look, not the rooster alone, that breaks him. The Catechism, remarkably, has made its judgment about that look part of catechesis itself: it calls it Jesus' look of infinite mercy, and says it drew tears of repentance (CCC 1429). Being truly seen in our sin by the One we wounded is the most dreaded moment in the world, and the Gospel's claim is that His seeing is mercy: it breaks the heart open, not apart. Then read verse 62 once more, "And he went out and wept bitterly," and ask the closing question below.

7. Last question, and we will deliberately not answer it tonight. Somewhere in this same city, on this same night, another disciple has also betrayed Jesus, and he too will be filled with remorse. Two men, two betrayals, two floods of grief. Is all weeping the same? What makes the difference between grief that saves and grief that destroys? Hold your answer. Next session is entirely about it.

Do not open an answer box for this question. Let it hang. Close the Build section by having the room recall, together and aloud, the verse they memorized last week: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:32). That verse is the floor under tonight. End there.

DIG DEEPER: THE ROOSTER

Roman soldiers named the third watch of the night (roughly midnight to 3 a.m.) *gallicinium*, cockcrow. Jesus' prediction was not vague: before the night's clock struck its own name, the boast would be broken. The Gospels' honesty here is itself evidence: the early Church, in which Peter was

the chief shepherd, preserved and preached the unvarnished story of his worst hour in all four Gospels. A community inventing a legend flatters its founder; a community telling the truth about mercy needs his fall on the record.

DIG DEEPER: WHERE WAS THE LOOK POSSIBLE?

Luke's detail requires geography: Jesus, under guard in the high priest's house, could see the courtyard.

Ancient tradition places the house of Caiaphas on Jerusalem's western hill, and the church of St. Peter in Gallicantu ("at the cockcrow") marks one traditional site today, built above ancient rock-cut chambers. Wherever the exact spot, Luke's detail requires exactly this kind of setting, and pilgrims still stand there imagining the fire, and a Lord on trial turning His head.

SEND: TAKING IT WITH YOU

S1. Where are you following at a distance right now: connected to Christ but managing your exposure, editing yourself in certain rooms or around certain people? Name the courtyard.

S2. What is your fire: the comfort, company, or habit that quietly recalibrates what you are willing to say and be when the question comes? What would it cost to warm yourself somewhere else?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Guard the garden: pray for ten minutes every day this week BEFORE the day's tests, asking specifically, "Lord, show me the test I am not rehearsing for."
2. Once this week, close the distance on purpose: one act that identifies you with Christ in a room where you usually stay anonymous. It can be small; it cannot be invisible.
3. Pray with Psalm 51 once, slowly. If your own courtyard memory surfaces, do not argue with it and do not wallow in it; hold it before God with tonight's promise: the fire in the prophecy is a refiner's fire. Bring yourself back next week; the story is not over.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you were struck, and we scattered; you were faithful, and we warmed ourselves at other fires. We do not hide tonight from what we have denied by our words and our silences. Turn and look at us, and let your look do what it did in the courtyard: break our hearts open toward you and not apart

from you. You have prayed for us that our faith may not fail. We are holding onto that prayer in the dark, until morning. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou

wilt not despise."

Psalm 51:17 (RSV2CE)

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 7 quietly. Standing reminder about the sealed Session 1 sheet. Tell the group plainly: "Next week we find out what happened to two men who betrayed Him and wept. Do not miss it."

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Texts

- Luke 22:54-62, the distance, the fire, the three denials, the look, the weeping
- John 18:15-18, 25-27, the charcoal fire (anthrakia), the gate, the third denial

Live Discovery Text

- Zechariah 13:7-9, strike the shepherd; the refiner's fire; "they will call on my name"

Supporting Texts

- Matthew 26:31-32, Jesus quotes Zechariah and adds the Galilee appointment
- Luke 22:45-46, sleeping in Gethsemane: watch and pray
- John 18:10, Peter's sword
- Matthew 26:69-75, the escalation: oath, then curse
- Luke 22:31-32, the intercession (memorized last session; recalled aloud tonight)

Way of Salvation Strand (leader only)

- 1 Corinthians 10:12, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall
- Proverbs 16:18, pride goes before destruction

Catechism

- CCC 1429, the look of infinite mercy and the tears of repentance

- CCC 1851, our sins present in the Passion, Peter's denial named
- CCC 1451, contrition

Memory Verse

- Psalm 51:17

Take-Home 7: The First Charcoal Fire

Keep your Take-Home 1 sheet safe, still folded. We will need it soon.

WHAT WE FOUND

The fall came by degrees, and the degrees were the lesson. It began in the garden, where Peter slept through the armory: “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.” He had rehearsed the wrong test; he was ready to die by the sword, and the test that came was cold, tired, anonymous hours. He “followed at a distance”: braver than the ten who fled, and close enough to watch while far enough to hide, which is where most of us live our own denials. Then the fire in the cold courtyard, where Peter warmed himself among the enemies of his Lord, and the ambush: not a soldier but a servant girl. Three denials, each cheaper than the last, from reflex to oath to a curse called down on himself. Sin compounds.

But the fall had been foretold inside a promise. We read the oracle Jesus quoted on the way to the garden, and found what the same oracle promises just after “strike the shepherd,” a surviving third brought through fire: “I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver... They will call on my name, and I will answer them” (Zechariah 13:8-9). The fire is a refiner's fire, and Jesus attached an appointment to the prophecy before anyone fell: “After I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” Then the cock crowed, “and the Lord turned and looked at Peter” (Luke 22:61). The Catechism calls it the look of infinite mercy that drew tears of repentance (CCC 1429): the look that breaks a heart open, not apart. Peter went out and wept bitterly. And we left one question deliberately unanswered, because next session is entirely about it: two men betrayed Him that night, and both were filled with grief. Is all weeping the same?

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Ambrose of Milan / *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke, Book X*

Ambrose finds no recorded words of Peter's repentance: only tears, and he treats them as sufficient. What words could not dare to confess, weeping confessed, and the tears washed the fault the voice could not name. Grief that flows toward the wounded Lord is itself received as prayer.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom / *Homilies on St. Matthew, Homily 85*

The boast leaned on self, sleep disarmed prayer, and the fear of a servant girl accomplished what armed men could not, so that we might learn the measure of human weakness left to itself. Yet the fall of the chief of the apostles was permitted so that no sinner after him need ever despair of the

remedy.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Francis de Sales / *Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III, Chapter 9 (paraphrase)*

When we have fallen, we must not fall again into bitter rage against ourselves; that second fall is wounded pride disguised as contrition. Rise quickly, quietly, without amazement that weakness proved weak; grieve with a grief that is calm and full of hope, and set to work again.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Guard the garden: pray ten minutes every day BEFORE the day's tests, asking specifically, "Lord, show me the test I am not rehearsing for."
2. Once this week, close the distance on purpose: one act that identifies you with Christ in a room where you usually stay anonymous. Small is fine; invisible is not.
3. Pray with Psalm 51 once, slowly. If your own courtyard memory surfaces, hold it before God with this week's promise: the fire in the prophecy is a refiner's fire. And come back next week; the story is not over.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou

wilt not despise."

Psalm 51:17 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **Matthew 27:3-5** and **Mark 16:1-8**. In the Mark passage, read verse 7 twice, and notice two small words the angel adds.

Catechism references from tonight: CCC 1429, 1851, 1451.

Session 8: And Peter

Matthew 27:3-5, Mark 16:1-7, Luke 24:33-34 | 75 to 90 minutes | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group answers last week's suspended question by comparing the two men who betrayed Jesus in one night: they discover the difference between godly grief and worldly grief, and then they discover mercy going out looking for the fallen man by name: "go, tell his disciples and Peter."

Catholic Touchstone: There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive; Christ died for all, and He desires the door of pardon open to anyone who turns back (CCC 982). The only wound mercy cannot heal is the one we refuse to bring, and mercy does not even wait for us to bring it: it sends messengers.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Handle Judas with the Church's exact care. The comparison at this session's center is real and biblical, but it is a comparison of griefs, not of eternal destinies. Matthew says Judas "repented" (the Greek is *metamelētheis*, he was seized with remorse), returned the silver, and confessed aloud: "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood" (Matthew 27:3-4). Look hard at that: remorse, restitution, verbal confession of sin, elements we would normally applaud, and then he "went and hanged himself." The Church has never taught that Judas is certainly damned; she canonizes saints and has never once canonized a damnation, and we entrust every soul to the just mercy of God. What the Church does teach, and what this session teaches, is the difference between the two roads the two men walked from remorse: one grief collapsed inward and ended, as the Church's tradition has soberly read it, in despair; the other stayed in the wreckage, reachable, until mercy arrived. Be precise about this in the room, because someone at your table has wondered whether their own sin is the unforgivable kind.

The diagnostic text is St. Paul's: "godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Read through the two men, the definitions come alive. Worldly grief is self-referential: MY ruin, MY shame, MY unbearable new identity; it appoints itself judge, passes the sentence God has not passed, and carries it out, whether by rope or by the slower executions of self-hatred and hiding. Godly grief grieves the wounded relationship, faces the same facts, and stays turned toward the Person wounded, still reachable. Judas went to the priests, his partners in the sin, who offered him nothing ("What is that to us?"), and then went to himself as judge. Peter, so far as the record shows, went nowhere: he wept, and he waited in the

wreckage with the brethren. That waiting looks passive; it is the whole difference. He remained where mercy could find him.

And mercy came looking. Easter morning, the angel to the women: “But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee” (Mark 16:7). Two words, “and Peter,” preserved in the Gospel written, by the early Church’s testimony, from Peter’s own preaching. The man who assumes he has forfeited the title “disciple” is named separately so the message cannot miss him, and the message is the Galilee appointment made before the fall (Matthew 26:32): the prophecy’s reunion clause, now activated. Then the detail Scripture handles with astonishing delicacy: before any public restoration, the risen Lord met Peter alone. “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” (Luke 24:34); St. Paul preserves it at the head of the earliest creed: “he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (1 Corinthians 15:5). No Gospel narrates that meeting. Not one word of it. Some meetings between mercy and misery are too intimate for minutes, and among the first acts of the risen Christ, before He stood among the assembled apostles, was to find the friend who had denied Him, privately, before anything public was asked of him.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Hosea 11:8-9 (the live discovery text; do not preview it). God’s own interior monologue over a people who betrayed Him: “How can I give you up, O Ephraim!... My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender... for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst.” The group discovers that “and Peter” has been the shape of God’s heart all along: mercy that cannot bring itself to let go, precisely because He is God and not man.

Psalms 130. “Out of the depths I cry to thee, O LORD... If thou, O LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee.” The prayer of the man in the wreckage who stays reachable; supply it in the answer to Question 3 or in closing.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Augustine / *The City of God, Book I, Chapter 17*

Weighing Judas’ end, St. Augustine renders the tradition’s sober judgment on despair: in destroying himself, Judas did not atone for the betrayal but compounded it, for despairing of God’s mercy he left himself no room for the saving repentance that was still possible. Augustine’s point is surgical: the final wound was not the betrayal, terrible as it was, but the verdict Judas passed on himself in God’s place. Mercy was not exhausted; it was pre-empted.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom / *Exhortation to Theodore After His Fall*

Writing to a friend who had fallen and believed himself beyond recovery, St. Chrysostom names despair as the devil’s favorite weapon: sin wounds, but despair kills, because it persuades a man to stop fighting before God has stopped forgiving. The enemy’s strategy, he says, is to make us careless

before the fall and hopeless after it, and both lies serve the same end. Against them Chrysostom sets the whole record of mercy: no wound is incurable to the Physician who wills to heal.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Faustina Kowalska / *Diary of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, 723*

The apostle of Divine Mercy recorded the Lord's insistence, against every instinct of shame, that the greater the sinner, the greater his right to God's mercy: souls are not to measure His forgiveness by the size of their sin but by the depths of His goodness. Her whole message is "and Peter" written out at book length: mercy is not merely available to the worst moment of your life; it is especially addressed there.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 982:** There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive; there is no one, however wicked and guilty, who may not confidently hope for forgiveness, provided his repentance is honest. Christ desires the doors of forgiveness open to anyone who turns back from sin.
- **CCC 1864:** The only sin that cannot be forgiven is the one that refuses forgiveness: deliberately refusing to accept God's mercy by repenting rejects the forgiveness of sins. Hardness against mercy, not any particular act, is the fatal condition.
- **CCC 1847:** Quoting St. Augustine: God created us without us, but he did not will to save us without us. Mercy sends the message; the message must still be received, which is exactly what next week's shore will show.

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND, LEADER ONLY)

MOVEMENT 8 OF THE KERYGMA: MERCY SEEKS THE SINNER

The Gospel is not that mercy is available; it is that mercy is in pursuit. Didactic texts: Romans 5:8 ("while we were yet sinners Christ died for us"); 2 Corinthians 7:10 (the two griefs, used openly tonight); Hosea 11:8-9. The order of Easter morning is the order of salvation: mercy's message goes out BEFORE Peter has apologized, confessed to the Lord, or been restored publicly; his bitter tears are already grief, but not one word has yet passed between him and the One he denied; his repentance, already begun in those tears, unfolds inside the encounter with mercy rather than being demanded as its entry fee. Guardrail both ways tonight: no sin out-runs mercy, AND mercy must be received (CCC 1847); presumption and despair are twin refusals. Do not teach this strand aloud.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY, NEVER REVEAL)

- **The names.** “And Peter” from the angel; “appeared to Simon” from the Eleven; “Cephas” in the creed. The name thread is converging; track it silently and let Session 9 cash it.
- **Galilee activated.** Mark 16:7 repeats Matthew 26:32 almost verbatim: the appointment survives the fall. Next session happens AT that appointment. Say nothing.
- **The unnarrated meeting.** Luke 24:34 and 1 Corinthians 15:5. Private mercy precedes public restoration; Session 9 is the public half. Do not connect them aloud tonight.
- **CRITICAL LOGISTICS.** Next session the sealed guesses are opened. Tonight's dismissal and Take-Home 8 both instruct participants to BRING their Take-Home 1 sheet next week, still sealed. Have a plan for anyone who forgets or has lost it (a quiet minute to rewrite from memory before the reveal). Do not say why the sheet is needed.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group resolves last week's question by comparing Judas and Peter through 2 Corinthians 7:10 and can define godly versus worldly grief in their own words.
2. The group states the Church's precise teaching: no sin outruns mercy; the only fatal condition is refusing it; and no one's damnation is ours to declare.
3. The group discovers Hosea 11 and connects God's ancient heart to “and Peter.”
4. The group registers the unnarrated private meeting between the risen Christ and Simon, and what its privacy says about how mercy handles shame.
5. Every participant leaves instructed to bring their sealed Take-Home 1 sheet next week.

TIME NOTE

Core session runs about 75 minutes. If long: cut one Win question and the second Dig Deeper. **Do not cut** the Hosea discovery, Question 5, or the Send questions. Pastoral note: this is the session where someone may privately believe they are Judas. Watch for the quiet ones and follow up personally this week.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Father of mercies, two men betrayed your Son in one night, and both were seized with grief. Teach us tonight the difference between the grief that saves and the grief that destroys, and root out of us the lie that any of us has out-sinned your mercy. Send your word to find us the way your angel found the fisherman: by name, with an appointment already made. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Open questions; every answer is welcome. Gentle tone again tonight.

W1. When you fail badly, what does the voice in your head sound like in the first hour afterward? Whose voice is it, if you're honest?

W2. Has anyone ever come looking for you when you were hiding, literally or figuratively? What did it mean that they came first?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Matthew 27:3-5

1. Read Judas' morning like an auditor. Matthew says he “repented,” returned the thirty pieces of silver, and confessed out loud: “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.” Remorse, restitution, verbal confession: on paper, that is more than we saw from Peter in the courtyard. So what is missing? Where does Judas take his confession, and what do they tell him?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

He takes it to the chief priests, the partners of the sin, and they answer with the coldest sentence in the Gospels: “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” And that is precisely what Judas then does: he sees to it himself. He appoints himself judge over his own case, passes the sentence God had not passed, and carries it out. What is missing from his remorse is not sincerity but a direction: it never turns toward the One betrayed, who was at that hour still alive, still in the city, and still the same Lord who had washed Judas' feet the night before. Remorse aimed at the self, or at accomplices, or at the mirror, has nowhere to put the weight down. The group should feel the tragedy precisely: mercy was not exhausted that morning; it was pre-empted.

2. St. Paul gives us the diagnostic for last week's homework question. Read 2 Corinthians 7:10 aloud: “godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.” Now define both griefs, using only what you have watched Judas and Peter do. What makes grief “worldly,” and what makes it “godly”?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Worldly grief, read off Judas, is self-referential: its sentences all begin with I and mine: my ruin, my shame, the unbearable person I now am. It faces real facts but appoints the self as judge, and the self is a merciless judge. Its endpoint is death, sometimes by rope, more often by the slower executions: self-hatred, hiding, quitting the faith because we cannot face the room. Godly grief, read off Peter, faces the identical facts (he really did it, three times, with oaths) but grieves the wounded relationship rather than the wounded self-image, and therefore stays turned toward the Person wounded. Notice how little Peter does: he weeps, and he stays with the brethren in the wreckage. It

looks passive; it is everything. He remains where mercy can find him. The dividing line between the two griefs is not the size of the sin or the volume of the tears; it is which direction the grief faces and who is allowed to be judge.

3. The obvious fear under all of this, say it out loud for the room: is there a sin so serious that mercy will not cover it? Was Judas' betrayal simply too big? What does the Church actually teach, and be precise?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Be exact, because someone at this table needs exactness. First: there is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive; no one, however wicked, who may not confidently hope for forgiveness if his repentance is honest (CCC 982, nearly word for word). Peter's denial with oaths and curses is forgiven; Paul's persecution unto death is forgiven; the size of the sin has never been the variable. Second: the only unforgivable condition is the refusal of forgiveness itself; the hardness that will not repent and will not receive mercy (CCC 1864). It is not that God's mercy runs out; it is that mercy, refused to the end, cannot heal what will not be brought to it. Third, about Judas himself: the Church has never declared him, or anyone, damned. We know his acts; the tradition, following St. Augustine, has read his end as despair; his final state belongs to the just mercy of God, and we are forbidden the judge's seat he tragically climbed into. Then say it plainly to the room: if you are worried you have committed the unforgivable sin, the worry itself is evidence you have not, because hardness does not worry. The person still asking is still reachable, and the whole point of tonight is that mercy comes looking for the reachable.

READ ALOUD: Mark 16:1-7

4. Easter morning. The women come to anoint a corpse and meet an angel with a message. Read verse 7 twice and weigh every word: "But go, tell his disciples AND PETER that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you." Why those two words? What does it mean that heaven's first Easter message singles out, by name, the man who denied Him?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Because the man who cursed and swore "I do not know him" would hear "tell his disciples" and assume, with the arithmetic of shame, that the word no longer includes him. Shame always resigns on God's behalf. So mercy names him separately, so the message cannot miss: yes, Peter, you. And weigh what the message IS: "he is going before you to Galilee... as he told you." It is the appointment Jesus attached to the very prophecy of the fall (Matthew 26:32), still standing, unrevoked by everything that happened at the fire. The fall did not cancel the appointment; the appointment had already accounted for the fall. One more weight for the scale: the early Church's consistent testimony is that Mark's Gospel preserves Peter's own preaching, which means "and Peter" is in the Bible because Peter himself would not stop telling people about the morning mercy called him by name.

5. “And Peter” is not a new mood in God. It is His oldest one, and He once let a prophet publish His interior monologue about a people who had betrayed Him.

Live discovery: say: “Read Hosea 11:8-9 in pairs. Israel has been faithless for chapters; this is God talking to Himself about it. What do you hear in His voice, and what reason does He give for not letting go?” Let pairs report before the answer box.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The pairs should hear something almost unbearable: God letting us overhear, in daringly human words, what mercy sounds like from the inside: judgment is deserved, and He will not deliver it. In God, mercy and justice are not rivals, but Hosea dares to voice the mystery as an argument God resolves in mercy's favor. “How can I give you up, O Ephraim!... My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender.” And the reason He gives is the deepest sentence in the prophets: “for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst.” We assume holiness means distance from betrayers; God says His holiness is precisely why He will not do what wounded humans do. A man gives up; God is not man. “And Peter” on Easter morning is Hosea 11 with a name filled in. The group should carry the connection out the door: the mercy that hunted Peter is not a New Testament personality change; it is who God has always insisted He is.

6. One more thing happened that day, and Scripture handles it with strange delicacy. The Eleven greet the Emmaus disciples: “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” (Luke 24:34). Paul puts it first in the earliest creed: “he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (1 Corinthians 15:5). The risen Christ met Peter alone, before the others, and no Gospel tells us one word of what was said. Why do you think that meeting is in the record but its contents are not, and what does the sheer order of events (this meeting FIRST) tell you about the risen Christ?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

On the silence: some meetings between mercy and misery are too intimate for minutes. Scripture confirms the meeting happened, twice, and then draws a curtain, and every soul that has ever knelt in a confessional understands why: what mercy says to a particular man's worst hour belongs to the two of them. The delicacy is itself a revelation of how God handles shame: He does not process Peter in front of the group. On the order: look at what the risen Lord did with the first hours of the greatest victory in history. Before He appeared to the assembled Eleven, before commissions and proofs offered to skeptics, He sought out the friend who had denied Him. Private mercy before public anything. Whatever restoration still needs to happen in front of the others (and something does; hold that thought one week), the wound between Jesus and Simon was sought out first, by Jesus. Mercy does not wait for the apology to be drafted. It knocks.

DIG DEEPER: TWO WORDS FOR REPENTANCE

Matthew says Judas “repented” with the Greek *metamelētheis*: regret, remorse, the anguish of wishing something undone. The New Testament's usual word for saving repentance is different: *metanoia*, a turning of the mind and heart toward God. The vocabulary is not a rigid code, but the

distinction it gestures at is tonight's whole lesson: remorse feels the wound; repentance turns toward the Healer. One can drown in the first without ever reaching the second.

DIG DEEPER: THE CREED BEFORE THE CREEDS

1 Corinthians 15:3-5 ("delivered to you... what I also received") is widely recognized as a formula Paul himself received, dating to within a few years of the events. Its witness list begins: "he appeared to Cephas." The private mercy shown to Simon Peter is not a devotional flourish added later; it stands at the head of the oldest summary of the Gospel the Church possesses.

SEND: TAKING IT WITH YOU

S1. Which grief is yours? When you fail, does your grief face the mirror or face the Lord? What is one concrete way to turn it around this week (naming it to God, to a confessor, to a trusted friend)?

S2. Whose "and Peter" could you carry this week: someone who has drifted or fallen and assumes the word disciple no longer includes them? What would it cost you to deliver the message by name?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray Psalm 130 once, slowly: the prayer of the reachable. If there is a courtyard in your past you have been seeing to yourself, Judas-style, bring it instead to the Lord this week, and if you are Catholic, consider bringing it to Confession, where the private meeting still happens and the contents are still sealed.

2. Deliver one "and Peter": reach out, by name, to one person who has drifted from faith or from your community, with zero agenda except that they hear the door is open.

3. BRING YOUR TAKE-HOME 1 SHEET NEXT WEEK, sealed guess still folded. Put it with your keys tonight. You will need it.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, you spent the first hours of your victory looking for the friend who denied you. Find us the same way. Take from us the worldly grief that faces the mirror and appoints itself judge, and give us the godly grief that faces you and finds you already turned toward us. For those we love who think the word disciple no longer includes them: send your message by name, and if you like, send it through us. You are God and not man, the Holy One in our midst. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him,

as he told you.”

Mark 16:7 (RSV2CE)

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 8 and give the instruction slowly, twice: “Bring your Take-Home 1 sheet next week, guess still sealed. Put it with your keys tonight.” Do not explain why. If someone has lost theirs, quietly tell them to come five minutes early next week.

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Texts

- Matthew 27:3-5, Judas' remorse, the priests' answer, the end
- 2 Corinthians 7:10, godly grief and worldly grief (read openly tonight)
- Mark 16:1-7, the empty tomb and “and Peter”
- Luke 24:33-34 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, “appeared to Simon,” the creed's first witness

Live Discovery Text

- Hosea 11:8-9, “How can I give you up... for I am God and not man”

Supporting Texts

- Matthew 26:32, the Galilee appointment made before the fall
- Psalm 130, out of the depths: the prayer of the reachable
- Romans 5:8, while we were yet sinners (strand)

Catechism

- CCC 982, no offense the Church cannot forgive
- CCC 1864, the only fatal condition: refusing mercy
- CCC 1847, He does not save us without us

Memory Verse

- Mark 16:7

Critical Logistics

- Participants must bring Take-Home 1 (sealed) next session. Contingency for lost sheets: arrive early, rewrite from memory before the session.

Take-Home 8: And Peter

IMPORTANT: bring your Take-Home 1 sheet next session, guess still sealed.

WHAT WE FOUND

Two men betrayed Jesus in one night, and both were seized with grief. Judas “repented,” returned the silver, and confessed aloud, and then took his confession to his accomplices instead of to the One betrayed, appointed himself judge, and carried out a sentence God had not passed. St. Paul gave us the diagnostic: “godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation... but worldly grief produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Worldly grief faces the mirror: my ruin, my shame. Godly grief faces the same facts but stays turned toward the Person wounded, and stays where mercy can find it, which is all Peter did: he wept, and he waited in the wreckage. And the Church's teaching is precise: no offense is too great for forgiveness (CCC 982); the only fatal condition is refusing mercy to the end (CCC 1864); and no one's damnation, including Judas', is ours to declare (cf. CCC 1037).

Then Easter morning, and the two most tender words in the Gospels: “Go, tell his disciples AND PETER that he is going before you to Galilee” (Mark 16:7). Shame had already resigned on Peter's behalf; mercy named him so the message could not miss. The appointment Jesus made before the fall was still standing. We found the same heart in Hosea 11: “How can I give you up?... for I am God and not man.” And we found a meeting Scripture confirms twice and never narrates: the risen Lord appeared to Simon (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5): private mercy before public restoration, and what passed between them Scripture never records. Mercy does not wait for the apology to be drafted. It knocks.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine / *The City of God, Book I*

In destroying himself, Judas did not atone for the betrayal but compounded it: despairing of God's mercy, he left himself no room for the saving repentance still possible. The final wound was not the betrayal but the verdict he passed on himself in God's place. Mercy was not exhausted; it was pre-empted.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom / *Exhortation to Theodore After His Fall*

Sin wounds, but despair kills, because it persuades a man to stop fighting before God has stopped forgiving. The enemy makes us careless before the fall and hopeless after it, and both lies serve the same end. No wound is incurable to the Physician who wills to heal.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

Our Lord to St. Faustina | Diary, 1182

The greater the misery, the greater its claim on His mercy, so the Lord told St. Faustina: souls are not to measure forgiveness by the size of their sin but by the depths of His goodness. Mercy is not merely available to the worst moment of your life; it is especially addressed there.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray Psalm 130 once, slowly. If there is a courtyard in your past you have been seeing to yourself, bring it to the Lord instead, and if you are Catholic, consider Confession, where the private meeting still happens and the priest is bound by the sacramental seal, never permitted to reveal what you confess (CCC 1467).
2. Deliver one “and Peter”: reach out, by name, to one person who has drifted, with zero agenda except that they hear the door is open.
3. BRING YOUR TAKE-HOME 1 SHEET NEXT WEEK, guess still sealed and folded. Put it with your keys tonight.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him,

as he told you.”

Mark 16:7 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **John 21:1-19**, slowly. And again: **bring your Take-Home 1 sheet, sealed**. If you have lost it, come five minutes early and tell your leader.

Catechism references from tonight: CCC 982, 1864, 1847, 1037, 1467.

Session 9: The Second Charcoal Fire

John 21:1-19 | 90 minutes by design | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group discovers that John 21 deliberately rebuilds two scenes: the call at the boats (Luke 5) and the night of denial (the charcoal fire), and that mercy heals the wound at its site. They watch three denials answered by three confessions of love, each answered with mission, and then they open their own sealed guesses from Session 1 and make their own surrender.

Catholic Touchstone: Repentance is completed in love. The Catechism reads Peter's whole conversion as one arc: the look of mercy, the tears, and, after the resurrection, the threefold affirmation of love (CCC 1429). Mercy does not merely cancel the past; it commissions a future: feed my sheep.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This is the study's summit, and it is built almost entirely of discoveries the group is now equipped to make themselves. Your job tonight is restraint: ask, wait, and let eight weeks of planted threads detonate in their hands. Plan for the full 90 minutes; tell the group at the start that tonight runs long and is worth it.

The scene: seven disciples in Galilee (the appointment kept), and Peter announces, "I am going fishing" (John 21:3). Read it with sympathy and clear eyes: the text does not condemn the fishing trip, but many readers hear in it a fallen man drifting back toward the old identity, and the echoes of the old life (the boat, the night, the empty nets) are hard to miss. Failure always whispers the same lie: go back to what you were before He renamed you. And the old life answers with the old result: "that night they caught nothing," the same empty nets as the first morning. At dawn, a stranger on the beach: "Cast the net on the right side of the boat," and the sea repeats the miracle that started everything. John recognizes the signature first ("It is the Lord!"), but watch Peter: the man who once cried "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man" now throws himself into the sea toward Him (21:7). Nobody commands him. That distance, between "depart from me" and a man swimming to Jesus with his clothes on, is the entire study, and the group must be allowed to measure it themselves in Question 2.

On the beach: "a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread" (John 21:9). St. John's word is *anthrakia*, and he uses it exactly twice in his Gospel, exactly twice in the entire New Testament: the fire of the denial (18:18) and this one. Jesus has rebuilt the scene of Peter's worst hour: the fire, the early hour, and, coming, a question asked three times. This is the study's longest fuse, planted in Session 7

with instructions to say nothing, and it must detonate in the group's hands, not yours. Question 3 is engineered for it; if the room needs a nudge, the nudge is a question ("Where have we smelled this fire before?"), never a reveal.

Then the restoration. "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Three times, matching three denials, and note the address: the exact formula of the first meeting (John 1:42), as if Jesus is deliberately taking Simon back to the beginning to re-lay the foundation. "More than these," on its traditional reading, gently retires the old comparison ("though they all fall away, I will not"); Peter, notably, refuses the comparative this time. His answer has moved its foundation: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you" (21:17). Not "I know myself and I am ready" (the boast that broke), but "You know." His confidence has migrated from self-knowledge, which failed, to Christ's knowledge of him, which never did. He is grieved that the question comes a third time, and the grief is the medicine reaching the bottom of the wound: one spoken "I love you" per denial, none of them wasted. And each confession is answered not with absolution language but with a shepherd's commission: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Mercy here does not merely cancel a debt; it hands over a flock. Restoration in Christ's economy is restoration to mission, and (Ezekiel 34 will show the group) to an office that belongs to God Himself.

Finally 21:18-19: the cost, disclosed with total honesty ("you will stretch out your hands..."; John's aside: "This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God"), and then the last two words, "Follow me," which echo the very first call (Mark 1:17). The arc closes where it opened, except now the man knows exactly what following costs, and follows. Note on the Greek verbs for love (*agapaō* and *phileō*): the shift is real and the Dig Deeper box handles it with the honesty this study owes the group: some hear Jesus stooping to meet Peter's humbled vocabulary; many scholars note John alternates synonyms freely elsewhere; the Church has not settled it, and the scene's power does not depend on it.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23 (the live discovery text; do not preview it). Against the false shepherds of Israel, God promises: "Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep... I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep," and then, astonishingly, delegates: "I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David." Shepherding the flock is God's own claimed office, and God's habit is to exercise it through a chosen shepherd. When the Good Shepherd (John 10) hands Simon the crook three times on the beach, Ezekiel is the deed of transfer behind the scene.

The first catch as the deliberate backdrop. Luke 5:1-11 functions tonight as the study's own Old Testament: the group rereads it side by side with John 21 and mines the parallels and reversals themselves (Question 2). Have both passages on hand for every participant.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

On the threefold question, St. Augustine gives the Church her classic sentence: a threefold confession is rendered to answer a threefold denial, that the tongue might serve love as fully as it

had served fear. And he binds the confession to the commission: the proof of love Christ asks is not emotion aimed back at Himself but care for His flock: if you love me, it is my sheep you will feed, seeking in them not your own advantage but His glory. Love of the Shepherd is exercised as love of the sheep.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Alexandria / *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Book 12*

St. Cyril reads the scene as a formal healing and reinstatement: by the three confessions the three denials are annulled, and by the Lord's "Feed my sheep" the apostle is not merely pardoned but renewed in the apostolic office he might have seemed to forfeit, so that no trace of the wound is left to accuse him. Cyril's instinct matters pastorally: Christ's mercy is not content to leave a forgiven man haunted; it publicly re-entrusts to him the very stewardship his sin had touched.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory the Great / *Homilies on the Gospels, Homily 24*

Preaching on this dawn catch, St. Gregory dwells on the Lord who stands on the shore at daybreak after His friends' long, empty night: the sea's tossing and the night's futility belong to this passing world; the risen Christ stands on the solid shore of immortality, and He directs even the failed labor of His fishermen to an abundance they could not find alone. Gregory reads the meal He has prepared as pure gift: before Peter is questioned, he is fed. Mercy sets the table first and holds the conversation after breakfast.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1429:** The Catechism completes tonight the sentence it began in Session 7: Jesus' look of infinite mercy drew tears of repentance, and, after the Lord's resurrection, the threefold affirmation of love to him. The Church reads courtyard and shore as one act of conversion.
- **CCC 553:** Jesus entrusted a specific authority to Peter... after his resurrection: 'Feed my sheep.' The shepherd's charge on the beach is read by the Church alongside the keys of Caesarea Philippi.
- **CCC 1428:** Conversion is not a single event but the uninterrupted task of the whole Church and every disciple; the second conversion, as the Fathers called it, is tonight's subject and Peter its patron.

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND, LEADER ONLY)

MOVEMENT 9 OF THE KERYGMA: SURRENDER, REPENTANCE COMPLETED IN LOVE

Tonight the kerygma asks for its answer. The movements so far: God acts first; we cannot save ourselves; He is the Christ; the cross saves; faith clings; grace is received; sin is real; mercy pursues. Tonight: the response, which is not a performance of adequacy but a surrender of love: "You know

that I love you.” Luke 22:32 resolves before the group's eyes (the turning again has happened; the strengthening is commissioned). The response moment at the end of the session is the study's entire purpose gathered into ten minutes; protect it at all costs. Prepare: quiet instrumental music if that suits your group, pens, and the room arranged so writing is private. If Eucharistic Adoration is available to you, tonight is the night for it. Do not teach this strand aloud; tonight, live it.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY): TONIGHT THE THREADS RESOLVE

- **The charcoal fire detonates.** Anthrakia, John 18:18 and 21:9, the only two in the NT. The group finds it in Question 3. If they need a nudge: “Where have we smelled this fire before?” Nothing more.
- **The two boats close.** Luke 5 versus John 21 in Question 2: commanded into the deep versus leaping in unbidden; “depart from me” versus swimming toward Him. Let them measure the distance.
- **The name completes its arc.** “Simon, son of John” is the address of the first meeting (John 1:42). The rebuilding starts at the foundation.
- **Luke 22:32 resolves.** The group memorized it in Session 6 and stood on it in Session 7. Tonight, “when you have turned again” has happened; “strengthen your brethren” is handed over as sheep. Let them say it.
- **“Follow me” bookends.** The last words of the restoration echo the first words of the call (Mark 1:17). If the group hears the echo, the arc has landed.
- **The sealed guesses open tonight.** Full instructions in the discussion guide at Question 6. Have blank paper ready for anyone who lost their sheet.
- **Still holding:** 21:18-19 and “you shall follow afterward” resolve fully in Session 12; the third fire arrives in Session 10. Say nothing.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group discovers the Luke 5 and John 18 rebuilds themselves and articulates why mercy returns to the site of the wound.
2. The group traces the three confessions against the three denials and names where Peter's confidence now rests: not self-knowledge but Christ's knowledge of him.
3. The group discovers Ezekiel 34 and states what is being handed over with “feed my sheep.”
4. Sealed guesses are opened, compared with what it actually took, and each participant completes a written act of surrender.
5. The room leaves quietly, having responded rather than merely learned.

TIME NOTE

Plan the full 90 minutes and tell the group up front. If you must trim: cut both Dig Deeper boxes and shorten Win to one question. **Under no circumstances cut or rush** Question 6 and the response moment; if the discussion runs long, trim Question 5's report-backs instead.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, risen and standing on the shore, you kept the appointment you made before we fell. Tonight we come back to Galilee with Simon: to the boats, to the fire, to the question you will not stop asking. Ask it of each of us, and give us the grace to answer from the only ground that holds: you know everything; you know that we love you. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Keep Win brief tonight; the evening's weight is ahead.

W1. After a real failure, what do you tend to go back to? What is your “I am going fishing”?

W2. Has anyone ever taken you back to the place where something broke, in order to fix it there? What was that like?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: John 21:1-14

1. Verse 3: Peter announces, “I am going fishing,” and six others follow him into the boat. Given everything we have watched happen to this man, what is he doing? And notice what the night gives him: “that night they caught nothing.”

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The classic pastoral reading, not the only possible one but the one the echoes invite, is that he is drifting back toward the old identity. It is not villainy; it is what failure does: it whispers that the renaming was a mistake, that you should return to what you were before He called you, that the boat at least never asked you a question by a fire. Give Peter his due: he is in Galilee, at the appointment (Mark 16:7), waiting; but waiting has slid into regression, and even here his leadership persists: he goes backward and six men follow, because influence does not switch off when direction fails. And the old life answers with the old result: empty nets, all night, the exact futility of the first morning (Luke 5:5). The group should hold the pastoral point: after our falls, the old life reliably underdelivers, and its emptiness is itself a mercy: it keeps us restless until dawn.

2. At dawn, a stranger on the beach, one strange instruction, and an unmanageable catch. We have been here before, almost exactly, and the differences are the point.

Live discovery: say: “Split in half. One half reread Luke 5:1-11, the other stay in John 21:1-14. Build two lists together: every parallel between the scenes, and every difference. The differences are the treasure.” Give this generous time; let both halves report fully before the answer box.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Parallels they should find: Galilee, fishermen, a night of nothing, a command against the evidence, obedience, a catch past managing, unbroken nets or nearly breaking nets, Peter singled out, a call at the end. Then the differences, which measure the whole study. In Luke 5, Jesus must command Peter into the deep, and Peter obeys reluctantly (“we toiled all night”); in John 21, the moment Peter hears “It is the Lord,” nobody commands him anything: he throws himself into the sea toward Jesus, clothes and all, and lets the boat catch up. In Luke 5, the miracle drives Peter away (“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man”); in John 21, the same miracle, recognized by the same man, now a worse sinner than he knew then, drives him toward. Ask the group directly: what happened to this man between those two boats? They have spent eight weeks watching the answer: he has learned who Jesus is toward sinners. The knowledge of sin that once said “depart” now says “get me to Him faster than this boat can go.” That reversal, unbidden, is what conversion is.

3. Verse 9: when they land, “they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread.” Jesus has made them breakfast. But look at that fire. Look at it very carefully, with eight weeks of memory. What has Jesus built on this beach, and why would He do that?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Wait as long as it takes; someone will smell it. St. John uses this specific word, anthrakia, a charcoal fire, exactly twice in his Gospel and exactly twice in the entire New Testament: the fire in the high priest's courtyard where Peter denied Him (18:18), and this one. Dawn, firelight, and, about to come, a question asked three times: the scene of Peter's worst hour has been rebuilt around him (John 18:18 tells us that night was cold and had this same charcoal fire). Why? Because mercy does not merely file the past away; it heals the wound at the site. Left alone, that courtyard would have owned a piece of Peter forever: every charcoal smell, every early cold, every triple anything would have dragged him back to the girl at the gate. So Jesus takes the scene away from the shame and gives it back rebuilt: same fire, same setting, same three, but now the script is love. This is sacramental logic, and it is how He still works: He does not ask us to pretend the courtyard never happened; He meets us in its rebuilt double and writes a new memory over the old coordinates. Notice, too, St. Gregory's detail: before one question is asked, Peter is fed. Mercy sets the table first.

READ ALOUD: John 21:15-17

4. “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” Three times, until Peter is grieved. Weigh everything: the name Jesus uses, the phrase “more than these,” the count of three, and, most of all, the shape of Peter's final answer: “Lord, you know everything;

you know that I love you.” What is being rebuilt here, and what has permanently changed in Peter's answer compared to his old boasts?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The name: “Simon, son of John” is the exact address of the first meeting (John 1:42), before the renaming. Jesus takes him back to the foundation and re-lays it. The phrase “more than these” is ambiguous in the Greek (more than these men love me? more than you love them? more than these boats and nets?), but on the traditional reading, “more than these disciples do,” it gently exhumes the old boast (“though they all fall away, I will not”), and watch Peter decline the comparison: no rankings this time, no “more than they do.” The count of three is the medicine matched to the wound: one spoken love per denial, and the grief at the third question is the treatment reaching the bottom; the tongue that served fear three times is conscripted three times by love, as St. Augustine says. And the foundation of the final answer has moved, permanently: not “I know myself and I am ready” (self-knowledge, which failed in the dark), but “YOU know everything; you know that I love you.” Peter has relocated his confidence from his own self-assessment to Christ's knowledge of him, and Christ's knowledge of him includes the courtyard and loves him still. That is the only ground that holds, for him and for everyone at this table: not the strength of my grip on Him, but His knowledge of me, all of me, and His refusal to leave.

5. Each confession gets an answer, and it is not the answer we would script. Not “you are forgiven,” not “let us never speak of it again,” but: “Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep.” Israel had heard about God and sheep before.

Live discovery: say: “Read Ezekiel 34:11-16 and verse 23 in pairs. Whose job is shepherding the flock, according to God Himself? And what does God say He will do about it?” Let pairs report before the answer box.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The pairs should find the astonishing claim: “Behold, I, I MYSELF will search for my sheep... I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep,” and then the delegation: “I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David.” Shepherding Israel is God's personally claimed office, and God's stated plan is to exercise it through a chosen shepherd. Jesus has already announced Himself as that Shepherd (“I am the good shepherd,” John 10:11). So measure what happens on this beach: the Good Shepherd hands Simon Peter the crook, three times, over MY lambs, MY sheep. This is restoration past all our categories: not merely pardon, not merely reinstatement to the group, but public re-entrustment with the very stewardship his sin had touched (the Church treasures this scene alongside the keys, CCC 553). Here mercy's answer to confessed love is a commission. Peter's shepherding office is unique, but the pattern echoes through the whole Church: Christ characteristically restores the forgiven to mission (CCC 1429). Whatever He forgives in us, He loves to use.

READ ALOUD: John 21:18-19

6. “Truly, truly... 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,” and John tells us plainly this signified the death by which Peter would glorify God. And then two words: “Follow me.” We have heard those words before, at the very beginning. Why does Jesus disclose the cost NOW, in the same breath as the restoration, and what has changed about “Follow me” between the first time and this time?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

He discloses the cost now because this restoration is a real commissioning, and He does not recruit with fine print. The first call, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Mark 1:17; cf. Matthew 4:19), was answered by a man who imagined he knew the price and did not; this one is offered to a man who has watched the price crucified, has failed it once, and follows anyway. Same two words; entirely new depth of consent. And so the arc closes where it opened: nets, a catch, a call, except the man walking away from the boats this time carries no boast, one wound healed at its own fire, a flock on his shoulders, and a death in his future that he now knows will glorify God. That is what this study has meant by surrender. Now it is our turn.

THE SEALED GUESS AND THE RESPONSE MOMENT

OPEN THE SHEETS (LEADER SCRIPT, UNHURRIED)

Say: “Take out your Take-Home 1 sheet. Nine weeks ago, before any of this, you wrote a guess: what would it take for Simon to become the rock Jesus named him? Open it now. Read your own handwriting. Then let's hear some.” Let several be read aloud; honor every one. Then ask the room: “Now that you have watched it happen, what did it actually take?” Draw the contrast gently: most guesses involve Peter becoming stronger, braver, more disciplined. What it took was a fall that broke his self-confidence, a look of mercy, an appointment kept, a rebuilt fire, three questions, and a love that answered from new ground. It took surrender, sustained by grace, through failure. Not the rock becoming harder: the rock becoming His.

Then the second line. Say: “Under your guess is a second line you wrote to yourself: what would be hardest for YOU to leave in the boat? Read it silently.” Pause. “For nine weeks that thing has been sitting in a folded paper. Tonight you answer for it.”

The response moment (protect ten full minutes). Lower the lights or light a candle if that suits your group; quiet instrumental music is fine; silence is better than hurry. Say: “On the blank space of your sheet, or the paper provided, write a short prayer of surrender in your own words, handing that named thing to Christ. If you do not know how to start, start where Peter ended: 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you,' and go from there. Nobody will collect this. Nobody will read it. When you finish, sit with Him until the others finish.” If Eucharistic Adoration is available tonight, this is the moment to be before Him. Close the silence with the closing prayer, quietly, and dismiss gently; do not debrief the moment or ask people to share. Follow up one on one this week where the Spirit points you.

DIG DEEPER: TWO WORDS FOR LOVE

In the Greek, Jesus' first two questions use *agapaō* and Peter answers with *phileō*; the third time, Jesus asks with Peter's own word. Some readers, ancient and modern, hear a tender descent: the Lord stooping to meet a humbled man's more modest vocabulary. Many scholars counter that St. John alternates such synonyms freely elsewhere (as he does with words for sheep and for knowing in this very passage). The Church has not settled the question, and honesty requires saying so. What no reading can remove: the third question grieved Peter, and the grief was allowed to reach the bottom of the wound before the healing sealed it.

DIG DEEPER: ONE HUNDRED FIFTY-THREE

John counts the fish: 153, and untorn nets. The Fathers proposed many meanings (St. Jerome passed along the idea that ancient naturalists counted 153 kinds of fish, making the catch an image of every nation gathered; others found number patterns). Hold every theory loosely. The precise count reads like the memory of someone who was there and counted (cf. John 21:24), and on any reading the catch, abundant and the net untorn, suggests a mission with no one left out.

SEND: TAKING IT WITH YOU

S1. This week, where will you let Him rebuild a fire: what wound-site have you been avoiding that He may be asking to heal at its own coordinates (a conversation, a place, a confessional)?

S2. "Feed my sheep" was mercy's answer to love. Who are the lambs already in front of you, and what is one act of feeding them you will do before we meet again?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Keep your surrender prayer. Pray it once a day this week, word for word, especially on the day it stops feeling true.
2. If you are Catholic, strongly consider Confession this week: Christ's rebuilt fire for each of us, where mercy meets you at the site of the wound and restores you to communion and to mission, available every Saturday afternoon. If you are exploring, tell your leader one thing tonight's session made you want.
3. Do the one act of feeding you named in the Send question. Do it before Sunday.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you stood on the shore while we rowed through our long night, and you built the fire yourself. We have opened our old guesses and found your ways past all our guessing. Take now what we have written and what we have held back too long; we leave it in the boat. You know everything; you know that we love you. Feed us, and make us feeders of your flock. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”

John 21:17 (RSV2CE)

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 9 quietly as they leave. No announcements after the response moment except next week’s reading, printed on the sheet.

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Text

- John 21:1-14, the return to the boats, the catch, the leap, the charcoal fire
- John 21:15-17, the threefold restoration and commission
- John 21:18-19, the cost disclosed; “Follow me”

Live Discovery Texts

- Luke 5:1-11, reread side by side with John 21 (Question 2)
- Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23, God the shepherd and the shepherd He sets up

Supporting Texts

- John 18:18, the first charcoal fire (the group finds it; have the reference ready)
- John 1:42, “Simon, son of John”: the address of the first meeting
- John 10:11, I am the good shepherd
- Luke 22:31-32, resolves tonight: turned again; strengthen your brethren
- Mark 16:7, the appointment being kept

Catechism

- CCC 1429, the arc of Peter's conversion completed
- CCC 553, feed my sheep alongside the keys
- CCC 1428, ongoing conversion

Memory Verse

- John 21:17

Materials Tonight

- Every participant's sealed Take-Home 1 (contingency paper for losses)
- Pens; blank paper; candle or quiet music if suited; Adoration if available

Take-Home 9: The Second Charcoal Fire

Keep your surrender prayer. It is yours and His alone.

WHAT WE FOUND

Peter went back to the boats (“I am going fishing”), and the old life answered with the old emptiness: a night of nothing. At dawn, a stranger, one instruction, and the sea repeated the miracle that started everything. We set the two boat scenes side by side and measured the distance of the whole study: in Luke 5, Jesus had to command Simon into the deep, and the catch drove him away (“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord”). In John 21, nobody commanded anything: the moment he heard “It is the Lord,” Peter threw himself into the sea toward Him. Same miracle, same sinner, opposite direction. That reversal is what conversion is.

On the beach, a charcoal fire: St. John uses that word exactly twice in the whole New Testament, the fire of the denial and this one. Jesus rebuilt the scene of Peter's worst hour, prop by prop, because mercy heals the wound at its site: same fire, same count of three, new script. “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”, the address of their first meeting, asked three times, one for each denial, until the grief reached the bottom of the wound. And Peter's answer stood on new ground forever: not “I am ready” but “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” His confidence had moved from his knowledge of himself, which failed in the dark, to Christ's knowledge of him, which never did. Each confession was answered with a flock: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep: the office God claimed as His own in Ezekiel 34, handed to a restored man. Then the cost, disclosed with total honesty, and the last two words, which were the first two words: “Follow me.” And then we opened our sealed guesses, and answered for ourselves.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine / *Tractates on John, Tractate 123*

A threefold confession answers a threefold denial, that the tongue might serve love as fully as it had served fear. And the proof of love Christ asks is care for His flock: if you love me, it is my sheep you will feed.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Alexandria / *Commentary on John, Book 12*

By the three confessions the three denials are annulled, and by “Feed my sheep” the apostle is not merely pardoned but renewed in his office, so that no trace of the wound is left to accuse him. Mercy is not content to leave a forgiven man haunted.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory the Great / *Homilies on the Gospels, Homily 24*

The risen Christ stands on the solid shore of immortality while His friends toss on the night sea, and He directs even their failed labor to abundance. And before Peter is asked a single question, he is fed: mercy sets the table first and holds the conversation after breakfast.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Keep your surrender prayer; it is yours and His alone. Pray it once a day this week, word for word, especially on the day it stops feeling true.
2. If you are Catholic, strongly consider Confession this week: the rebuilt fire, available every week. If you are exploring, tell your leader one thing this session made you want.
3. Do the one act of “feeding” you named. Do it before Sunday.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”

John 21:17 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **Acts 2:1-41**. As you read, keep one question in mind: what happened to the man from the courtyard?

Catechism references from tonight: CCC 1429, 553, 1428.

Session 10: Repent and Be Baptized

Acts 2:1-41 | 75 to 90 minutes | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group discovers what the Holy Spirit made of the restored man: the coward of the courtyard preaching to thousands in the city that crucified Jesus, seven weeks later and a short walk from the fire. They hear the mechanics of salvation stated by the man who lived them (Acts 2:38), and they discover that Peter's great sermon quotes the very promise he once lived on the water.

Catholic Touchstone: "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" (Acts 2:38). The Catechism places this verse at the door of its baptismal teaching (CCC 1226): repentance, baptism, forgiveness, the Spirit, the Church. Salvation is not a private transaction; it lands a person in a body devoted to the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Set the scene's arithmetic before your group so the miracle of the man registers: Pentecost falls fifty days after Passover. Seven weeks ago, in this same city, this man crumbled before a servant girl at a fire a few minutes' walk from where he now stands. The authorities who engineered the crucifixion still hold office; the crowd contains Passover pilgrims who may have shouted in Pilate's courtyard. Into that city, at nine in the morning, Peter stands up "with the eleven" and lifts up his voice. Same man, same city, same danger, opposite direction. The difference is not therapy, self-improvement, or the passage of time: it is the event of that morning: "tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:3-4). Note for your own eyes what image the Spirit chose: fire. Say nothing; if your group has been paying attention for nine weeks, someone may see the arc of fires themselves; if not, Session 12 gathers it.

The sermon itself is the kerygma in its first public form, and its shape is worth showing the group: this Jesus, attested by mighty works, "you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up" (Acts 2:23-24), and therefore "let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (2:36). Peter indicts the crowd to their faces, and the result is not a riot but a piercing: "they were cut to the heart" (2:37). Truth spoken in the Spirit wounds in the way surgery wounds. And their question is the question this entire study has been building toward, the question of every awakened soul in history: "Brethren, what shall we do?"

Peter's answer is the session's summit: "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" (Acts 2:38). Walk your group through what is in it: repentance (the interior turning); baptism in Jesus' name (not optional, not decorative: "for the forgiveness of your sins"); and the gift of the Spirit (God's own life given). Then the reach: "the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off" (2:39), a horizon that will take even Peter years to see the width of. And then where salvation lands the three thousand: not in a private spiritual experience but in a community: "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (2:42): the Church, with the Eucharist at its heart. The man prescribing all this is prescribing nothing he has not received: he repented in tears, was restored at a fire, and is at this moment filled with the promised Spirit. The Gospel's first preacher is its proof of concept.

One resolution belongs wholly to the group, so guard it: Peter's sermon opens by quoting Joel, and the quotation ends: "And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). Eight sessions ago your group watched a sinking man call on the name of the Lord in three words and get caught. When they read 2:21 aloud, ask only: "Where have we watched somebody do exactly this?" and wait. The man who cried "Lord, save me" now stands in front of the world announcing that everyone who cries it will be.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Joel 2:28-32 (the live discovery text; do not preview it). Peter's own chosen text: the Spirit poured out on all flesh, sons and daughters prophesying, and the promise of 2:32. The group reads Joel whole and finds what Peter claims is happening in front of the crowd, and what the promise at the end is.

Ezekiel 36:26-27. "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you... and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." The interior transplant Pentecost performs; supply it in the answer to Question 1 if useful.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Jerusalem | *Catechetical Lectures, Lecture 17 (on the Holy Spirit)*

Catechizing candidates for baptism beside the very places these events happened, St. Cyril points to Peter as the Spirit's exhibit: the one who had denied with oaths before a little maid now, clothed with power from on high, catches three thousand souls in a single cast of the net. For Cyril the transformation is the argument: no natural cause turns that man into this man in fifty days; the Spirit who descended in fire is known by what He made of the fisherman.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons | *Against Heresies, Book III, Chapter 12*

Defending the faith against those who claimed a secret gospel behind the public one, St. Irenaeus leans his whole weight on Peter's Pentecost preaching: this is the apostolic proclamation, delivered

in public, in Jerusalem, by eyewitnesses filled with the Spirit, announcing the crucified and risen Jesus as Lord and Christ. What the Church hands on, Irenaeus insists, is nothing other than what Peter stood up and said: the kerygma is not esoteric; it was shouted in the street to three thousand people at nine in the morning.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose of Milan / *On the Mysteries*

Unfolding the sacraments to the newly baptized, St. Ambrose insists on what the water, joined to the Spirit and the word, actually does: it is not a symbol of a change accomplished elsewhere but the working of God, in which sin is truly forgiven, the old man buried, and the Spirit given, just as Peter promised the crowds. What you saw with your eyes was water, he tells the neophytes; what was accomplished in you was the power of God.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1226:** From the day of Pentecost the Church has celebrated and administered baptism; the Catechism quotes Acts 2:38 and 2:41 directly as the door of its teaching on the sacrament.
- **CCC 731-732:** On Pentecost the Holy Trinity is fully revealed and the Kingdom announced by Christ is opened; the Spirit is poured out and the Church is manifested to the world.
- **CCC 1076:** The Church was made manifest to the world on the day of Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; from Pentecost onward Christ acts through the sacraments in what the tradition calls the sacramental economy.
- CCC 1329, 1342: The Church has always recognized the breaking of bread as the Eucharist and has been faithful to the Lord's command from the beginning.

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND, LEADER ONLY)

MOVEMENT 10 OF THE KERYGMA: NEW BIRTH, THE SPIRIT, BAPTISM, THE CHURCH

Tonight the strand surfaces in the text itself: Acts 2:38 IS the kerygma's call, spoken by our man. Supporting didactic texts: Titus 3:5 (the washing of regeneration, planted in Session 6); Ezekiel 36:26-27. Two resolutions tonight: Acts 2:21 resolves Session 2 (the group must find it; see Question 3), and the tongues of fire quietly complete Zechariah's refining arc (courtyard fire, shore fire, Spirit fire): if no one sees the fires yet, hold it; Session 12 gathers the thread explicitly. One plant remains: Peter will write "Baptism... now saves you" (1 Peter 3:21) with his own pen; it resolves in Session 12. Do not teach this strand aloud.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY, NEVER REVEAL)

- **Acts 2:21 belongs to the group.** The Joel quotation's last line is the resolution of “Lord, save me.” Ask; wait; let them erupt. Do not take it from them.
- **The third fire.** Tongues as of fire. If someone traces courtyard, shore, Pentecost, celebrate hugely; otherwise, silence until Session 12.
- **Strengthen your brethren, underway.** Luke 22:32's commission is visibly operating: “Peter, standing with the eleven”: he stands, and they stand with him. Track silently.
- **“All that are far off” (2:39).** A horizon wider than Peter yet knows; it becomes Session 11's Cornelius. Say nothing.
- **Sealed guesses are done; surrender prayers are live.** A quiet word at dismissal: “Keep praying your prayer from last week.”

SESSION GOALS

1. The group measures the transformation by the arithmetic: seven weeks, same city, same danger, opposite direction, and names its cause: the Holy Spirit, not self-improvement.
2. The group discovers Joel 2 and, on their own, connects Acts 2:21 to “Lord, save me.”
3. The group can state the shape of the kerygma from Peter's sermon: you crucified him; God raised him; He is Lord and Christ; repent and be baptized.
4. The group walks through Acts 2:38 phrase by phrase and states where salvation lands a person: the community of 2:42 with the Eucharist at its heart.
5. Distribute Take-Home 10.

TIME NOTE

Core session runs about 80 minutes; the readings are long, so assign strong readers in advance and read Acts 2:14-36 in the selective chunks marked. If long: cut the second Dig Deeper and one Win question. **Do not cut** the Joel discovery or Question 5.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit. You turned a courtyard coward into the preacher of Pentecost, and you have not weakened since. Fill this room as you filled that one. Cut us to the heart with the truth about Jesus, put His answer in our mouths, and make of us what you made of the fisherman: witnesses. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Open questions; every answer is welcome.

W1. Have you ever seen a person change so much that old acquaintances did not recognize who they had become? What did people credit for it?

W2. What is the boldest thing you have ever done, and where did the boldness come from in the moment?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Acts 2:1-14 (through “lifted up his voice”)

1. Do the arithmetic out loud before anything else. Pentecost is fifty days after Passover. Seven weeks ago, in this same city, a few minutes' walk from this spot, this man crumbled before a servant girl. The men who crucified Jesus still hold office; the crowd includes Passover pilgrims. And “Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice.” What changed this man, and what did NOT change him? Rule things out.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Rule out the usual suspects. Time did not do it: fifty days does not rebuild a man. Therapy, resolve, and self-improvement did not do it: Peter's resolve was precisely what failed at the fire, and his restoration (last week) healed him but notice: even after the shore, he waited in the upper room; he did not preach until this morning. What changed him arrived at nine o'clock: “tongues as of fire... and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” The transformation is the Spirit's signature, and the early Church treated it as an argument in itself (St. Cyril of Jerusalem points at Peter and says: no natural cause turns that man into this man). And what did NOT change: his name, his history, his voice, his role: grace does not replace Peter with someone else; it makes Peter finally, fully himself, the rock the name promised. God had a new heart to give (Ezekiel 36:26-27), not a new man to substitute.

2. Peter's first move is to open the Scriptures: “this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.”

Live discovery: say: “Read Joel 2:28-32 in pairs, the whole oracle Peter reaches for. What does Joel promise? Who is included? And what is the very last line of the promise?” Let pairs report before the answer box, and have someone read the last line aloud twice.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Joel promises the Spirit poured out on ALL flesh: sons and daughters, old and young, even servants, prophecy and dreams and visions: God's own life, democratized beyond every boundary Israel knew. Peter's claim is staggering in its plainness: THIS, this morning, this noise, these people, is

THAT. The last day's promise has begun. And the oracle's final line, which Peter quotes as the hinge of his sermon: "And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). Hold that line; the next question is about it.

3. Read Acts 2:21 aloud once more: "And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Now think back across this whole study. Where have we watched somebody do exactly this: call on the name of the Lord and be saved, in the most literal way imaginable?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Wait for it; do not rescue them quickly. The answer is Session 2, on the water, in three words: "Lord, save me," and the hand that immediately caught him. The man preaching this verse to the world is the man who lived it first: he sank, he called on the name, and he was caught, and now he stands in front of thousands announcing that what happened to him is on offer to everyone: whoever calls will be saved. This is why his preaching lands: the Gospel's first preacher is its proof of concept. He is not commending a theory; he is describing his own rescue and holding out the same hand. The group should feel the arc snap closed: the three-word prayer has become the first sermon's promise to the world.

READ ALOUD: Acts 2:22-24, 32-37

4. Look at the sermon's spine: "this Jesus... you crucified and killed... But God raised him up"; "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Peter indicts the crowd to their faces, in their city, and instead of a riot, "they were cut to the heart." Why does the accusation heal instead of enrage, and what is the crowd's question when it lands?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Because it is the truth, spoken by the Spirit, aimed not at humiliation but at rescue, and because the accusation comes bundled with the remedy: the One you crucified, God raised, and He is Lord: which means the worst thing you ever did has been overruled by God and turned into the hinge of your salvation. Truth in the Spirit wounds the way surgery wounds: it cuts to heal. Notice also who is preaching: a man with his own betrayal seven weeks old. There is no contempt in this sermon; the preacher knows the courtyard from the inside, and mercy received has made him fearless and gentle at once. And the crowd's question is the one this entire study has been building toward, the question of every pierced heart in history: "Brethren, what shall we do?" When that question is asked sincerely, the Gospel is one verse from landing.

READ ALOUD: Acts 2:38-42

5. Here is the answer, from the mouth of the man who lived every word of it: "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." Take it apart phrase by phrase: what is

each element, and, knowing Peter's story as you now do, where have we watched him live what he prescribes?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Repent: the interior turning, godly grief aimed at God: Peter learned it weeping in the dark and had it completed by three questions at a fire. Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins: not a symbol of forgiveness granted elsewhere but the appointed washing in which it is given (the Catechism opens its baptismal teaching with this very verse, CCC 1226): the man prescribing the washing once learned at the basin that being cleansed by Christ is not negotiable: “if I do not wash you, you have no part in me” (John 13:8). Not his baptism, but the same lesson: forgiveness comes through Christ's washing, on Christ's terms. And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit: the power that turned him inside out this very morning. The repentance and the Spirit he prescribes, he has visibly received before our eyes; the surrender each element demands is written across his own story. Then verse 39: “the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off”: a horizon whose width will surprise even Peter (hold that thought one week). And verse 42, where the three thousand land: “they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Salvation is not a private transaction that leaves you where it found you: it lands you in a body, at a table, under the apostles' teaching, in the prayers: the Church, with the Eucharist at its heart, on day one (the Church has always recognized “the breaking of bread” as the Eucharist: CCC 1329, 1342).

6. Three thousand baptized in a day, and the Church is visibly loose in the world. Step back and take in what God has done through this one surrendered man, and then answer honestly: what is the relationship between Session 9 and Session 10, between the fire on the beach and the fire on their heads? Could Pentecost have happened to the unrestored Peter?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Let the group build the answer: the surrender precedes the sending; the healing precedes the harvest. Consider what an unrestored Peter, still owned by the courtyard, still boasting or still hiding, would have made of that morning. In God's providence, it was the man with no boasts left, whose confidence had moved to “you know that I love you,” whom the Spirit could use without the message being about Peter. This is the study's practical word to every person in the room: the surrender you made last week was not the finish line; it was the removal of the cork. What God pours through surrendered people is not proportioned to their strength but to their availability. And a caution against the wrong lesson: the sequence is not “get fully healed, then serve” as an excuse for endless delay; Peter's healing was one week old and he was already in the upper room praying with the brethren. Surrendered, praying, and available: that is the readiness God, in His wisdom, prepared in Peter. The Spirit is sovereign and not bound to our sequence, but in Peter's story, the healing fittingly preceded the harvest.

DIG DEEPER: NINE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

Peter's first recorded joke may be Acts 2:15: these men are not drunk, "since it is only the third hour of the day," nine a.m. The detail also timestamps the Church's birthday: the Spirit did not wait for a solemn midnight; He came at the hour the workday begins, and the Church's first act was public witness during business hours, in the street, in every pilgrim's language.

DIG DEEPER: BABEL REVERSED

At Babel (Genesis 11), proud humanity's speech was confused and the nations scattered. At Pentecost, devout men "from every nation under heaven" each hear the mighty works of God in his own tongue, and by day's end three thousand are gathered into one body. The Fathers loved the symmetry: what pride scattered, the Spirit gathers; the Church is Babel run backward.

SEND: TAKING IT WITH YOU

S1. "Brethren, what shall we do?" is still the live question. If you have never been baptized, or never really repented, or never asked for the Holy Spirit: which phrase of Acts 2:38 has your name on it, and what is the concrete next step this month?

S2. Peter witnessed in his own city, among people who knew his failure. Who in your daily geography has watched your courtyard moments, and what would Spirit-given boldness (not self-generated bravado) look like with them this week? Ask Him for it by name.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray daily and explicitly to the Holy Spirit this week: "Come, Holy Spirit; do in me what you did in Peter." If that prayer scares you a little, good; pray it anyway.
2. Take one step on your Acts 2:38 phrase: a conversation about baptism or Confirmation, a real examination and repentance, or (if you are Catholic) Confession and intentional reception of the Eucharist within the 2:42 community this Sunday.
3. Tell one person, this week, one true sentence about what Jesus has done for you in these ten weeks. Not a speech: one sentence, in your own words, during business hours.

CLOSING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit: fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Lord Jesus, what you did with one surrendered fisherman fed three thousand in a morning; we hand you again what we surrendered at the shore, and we ask you to send us. Father, let the promise be for us and for our children and for all that are far off, until the whole catch is gathered in. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“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.”

Acts 2:38 (RSV2CE)

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 10; quiet reminder: “Keep praying your surrender prayer.”

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Texts (read in marked chunks)

- Acts 2:1-14, the Spirit, the fire, the crowd, Peter stands
- Acts 2:22-24, 32-37, the kerygma preached; cut to the heart; “what shall we do?”
- Acts 2:38-42, the answer; the three thousand; the four devotions

Live Discovery Text

- Joel 2:28-32, the Spirit on all flesh; “whoever calls on the name of the LORD”

Supporting Texts

- Acts 2:21, the resolution of “Lord, save me” (the group finds it)
- Ezekiel 36:26-27, the new heart and Spirit within
- Genesis 11:1-9, Babel (Dig Deeper)
- Titus 3:5, the washing of regeneration (strand)

Catechism

- CCC 1226, Acts 2:38 at the door of baptism
- CCC 731-732, Pentecost
- CCC 1076, the Church manifested; the sacramental economy
- CCC 1329, 1342, the breaking of bread is the Eucharist from the beginning

Memory Verse

- Acts 2:38

Take-Home 10: Repent and Be Baptized

Keep praying your surrender prayer from the shore.

WHAT WE FOUND

Do the arithmetic: fifty days. Seven weeks after crumbling before a servant girl, in the same city, among the same authorities, “Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice” to thousands. Time did not do that; resolve did not do that (resolve is what failed at the fire); the Holy Spirit did that, descending in tongues as of fire at nine in the morning. Grace did not replace Peter with someone else; it made Peter finally himself, the rock the name had promised. He opened Joel’s oracle: the Spirit poured out on all flesh, and its final line stopped us cold: “And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). We had watched a sinking man do exactly that, in three words, eight sessions ago. The man preaching the promise is the man who lived it: the Church’s first preacher at Pentecost is the Gospel’s proof of concept.

The sermon’s spine was the kerygma itself: this Jesus you crucified; God raised him up; God has made him both Lord and Christ. The truth cut the crowd to the heart, and they asked history’s question: “Brethren, what shall we do?” And the man who had lived every word gave the answer: “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” (Acts 2:38). Repentance he learned weeping; the washing he was once too proud to accept when Jesus knelt with the basin; the Spirit that had filled him that morning. Three thousand were baptized, and salvation landed them where it lands everyone: devoted “to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42): the Church, with the Eucharist at its heart, from day one. And the beach explained the morning: surrender precedes sending. What God pours through surrendered people is proportioned not to their strength but to their availability.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Jerusalem | *Catechetical Lectures*, 17

The one who had denied before a little maid now, clothed with power from on high, catches three thousand souls in a single cast of the net. No natural cause turns that man into this man in fifty days; the Spirit is known by what He made of the fisherman.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

In the spirit of St. Irenaeus of Lyons | cf. *Against Heresies*, Book III (editorial synthesis)

Irenaeus insisted that what the Church hands on is no secret doctrine but the public apostolic preaching: the crucified and risen Jesus, Lord and Christ, proclaimed openly by Spirit-filled eyewitnesses.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose of Milan / *On the Mysteries*

What you saw with your eyes was water; what was accomplished in you was the power of God: sin truly forgiven, the old man buried, the Spirit given, just as Peter promised the crowds.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray daily and explicitly to the Holy Spirit: "Come, Holy Spirit; do in me what you did in Peter." If it scares you a little, pray it anyway.
2. Take one concrete step on the phrase of Acts 2:38 that has your name on it: baptism, Confirmation, real repentance, Confession, or intentional Communion within the 2:42 community this Sunday.
3. Tell one person one true sentence about what Jesus has done for you in these ten weeks. One sentence, your own words, during business hours.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"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."

Acts 2:38 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read Acts 4:1-22 and Acts 10:9-35.

Catechism references from tonight: CCC 1226, 731-732, 1076.

Session 11: No Other Name

Acts 4:5-22, Acts 10, Galatians 2:11-14, Acts 15:7-11 | 75 to 90 minutes | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group follows the apostle through decades: boldness before the court that condemned Jesus, the door thrown open to the nations at Cornelius' house, a public relapse into fear of men at Antioch, and a final ringing definition of salvation as grace. They discover that conversion is lifelong: the restored man keeps being converted, keeps stumbling, and keeps rising, to the end.

Catholic Touchstone: “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12; CCC 432). Held together with the Church's teaching on God's universal saving will (CCC 847-848), and lived out in a man for whom conversion was never finished (CCC 1428): the second conversion is the uninterrupted task of the whole Church.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This session covers the most ground of any in the study: roughly two decades of one man's discipleship, chosen to teach one truth: the arc did not end at Pentecost. Keep the pace brisk in the early scenes so Antioch and the council get their time.

Scene one, Acts 4. A healing at the temple gate lands Peter and John before the Sanhedrin, and Luke names the names: Annas the high priest and Caiaphas (Acts 4:6), the same court that condemned Jesus, a few hundred yards from the courtyard fire. “Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit,” answers with Psalm 118:22 (the stone the builders rejected, the group's discovery text) and with the study's memory verse: no other name. The court's finding is the Gospel's best backhanded compliment: “they were uneducated, common men... and they recognized that they had been with Jesus” (4:13). Their boldness (*parrhēsia*) has one explanation on the record. And Peter's closing line to the court is a restored man's entire theology of witness: “we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (4:20).

Scene two, Acts 10. Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and the vision of the sheet: “What God has cleansed, you must not call common” (10:15). Peter crosses a Gentile threshold his own formation had taught him was off-limits; “you yourselves know how unlawful it is,” he says out loud (10:28), and then watches the Spirit fall on the uncircumcised mid-sermon. His summary is a conversion within a conversion: “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality” (10:34). The point for your group: years after Pentecost, the chief

of the apostles is still being stretched, still discovering the width of “all that are far off” (2:39). Grace did not finish with him in one morning.

Scene three, Antioch, and handle it with the Church's honesty. Galatians 2:11-14: Peter (Cephas) had been freely eating with Gentile Christians until “certain men came from James”; then, “fearing the circumcision party, he drew back and separated himself,” and his example dragged others, even Barnabas, into the hypocrisy, and Paul “opposed him to his face.” Let the group name the pattern: fear of men, under watching eyes, causing a public drawing-back from the truth he knows: the courtyard reflex, decades later, in miniature. Two precisions keep this honest and Catholic at once. First, the distinction Catholic interpreters have commonly drawn (and on which even the Fathers who debated this scene converged): Peter's error at Antioch was conduct, not teaching: he never taught that Gentiles must judaize (he had taught the opposite, and Acts 15 records him teaching it plainly at the council, whichever came first in time; scholars debate the chronology); he failed to live what he knew, which is hypocrisy, not heresy. The scene is therefore no embarrassment to what the Church believes about Peter's office; it is a demonstration that the office rests on grace rather than on the officeholder's nerves. Second, the glory of the scene, which St. Cyprian loved: as Cyprian read it, Peter took the public correction. No pulling of rank, no appeal to keys; the rock let himself be rebuked by the newest apostle and was corrected. Ongoing conversion includes being correctable.

Scene four, the council, Acts 15:7-11. When the circumcision question comes to a head, Peter rises and recalls Cornelius, and lands on the sentence this study planted in its very first session: “But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (Acts 15:11). The man called before he was worthy, restored after he had fallen, and corrected when he relapsed, defines salvation, on the record, as grace. Let the group hear it as the summary of everything they have watched.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Psalms 118:22 (the live discovery text; do not preview it). Peter tells the Sanhedrin: “This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner” (Acts 4:11). The group finds the psalm and weighs the wordplay: the man Jesus named Rock, preaching the rejected Stone to the builders who rejected Him. Peter will still be turning this psalm over years later when he writes his first letter; say nothing about that.

Isaiah 49:6. “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” The width of the promise Peter walks into at Cornelius' door; supply it in the answer to Question 4.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage | *Epistle to Quintus (Epistle 71)*

Writing two centuries later, St. Cyprian holds up Antioch as a portrait of Peter's greatness rather than his shame: Peter, whom the Lord chose first and on whom He built His Church, did not insolently claim anything for himself when Paul disputed with him, nor demand obedience to his seniority; he did not despise Paul for having once persecuted the Church, but received the counsel

of truth and readily agreed to the lawful course Paul urged: giving us, Cyprian says, a pattern of concord and patience, that we should not stubbornly love our own opinions but make truth's counsel our own.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

On the Cornelius narrative, St. Bede reads the sheet let down from heaven as the Church herself, holding every kind of creature: what God has cleansed in the waters of baptism, no man may call common, and the Spirit falling on the Gentiles before their baptism showed Peter that God's election runs ahead of human gatekeeping. For Bede the scene is the hinge of history: the door of faith swinging open to the nations through the hands of the fisherman, exactly as the keys had promised.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom / *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*

Preaching through Acts, St. Chrysostom keeps returning to the wonder of 4:13: unlettered men silencing the supreme court of their nation, and the court itself supplying the explanation: they had been with Jesus. Boldness of this kind, he insists, is not temperament: the same Peter had been routed by a doorkeeper's question; it is the Spirit's gift, given to the praying, and the proof is that when the apostles were threatened, they did not ask for safety but prayed for more boldness still, and the place was shaken.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- CCC 432: The name Jesus means God saves; it is the divine name that alone brings salvation; there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved (quoting Acts 4:12).
- CCC 434: The name invoked over the healed man is the name above every name, the name in which the disciples worked miracles.
- CCC 846-848: Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but seek God with a sincere heart, may achieve eternal salvation; yet whatever grace reaches anyone comes from Christ, and the Church retains the obligation and the sacred right to evangelize all men. The exclusive claim and the universal hope are held together, not traded off. CCC 846 supplies the frame: all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body.
- **CCC 1428:** Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians; this second conversion is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church. Antioch is what the need for it looks like in an apostle.

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND, LEADER ONLY)

MOVEMENT 11 OF THE KERYGMA: ONLY JESUS, GRACE ALONE RECEIVED, CONVERSION LIFELONG

Two resolutions land tonight. Acts 4:12 states the kerygma's exclusivity; Acts 15:11 resolves the plant from Session 1's reference card: salvation is "through the grace of the Lord Jesus." Guard the balance the whole session teaches: against once-saved-always-presumption, Peter's Antioch relapse shows that grace must be walked in daily and can be failed; against despair, his correction and recovery show that relapse is not disqualification. The Christian life is neither a finish line crossed at conversion nor a tightrope over the abyss: it is a long road walked by grace, with a Shepherd who has prayed for us and a Church that corrects us. Do not teach this strand aloud.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY, NEVER REVEAL)

- **The courtyard echo at Antioch.** Fear of men, watching eyes, public drawing-back: Question 5 is engineered so the GROUP names the pattern ("where have we seen Peter fold under a stranger's gaze before?"). Do not name it for them.
- **Acts 15:11 resolves Session 1.** The grace sentence has been on the Session 1 reference card since the beginning. If any longtime participant remembers, celebrate.
- **Psalm 118 has a future.** Peter quotes the stone tonight; he will write about it in his letter next week. Say nothing.
- **The name Cephas.** Paul calls him Cephas at Antioch: the Aramaic of the name thread surfacing in the epistles. Track silently.
- **Last week of plants.** Everything still open ("follow afterward," stretch out your hands, the three fires, 1 Peter's resolutions) lands next session. Build attendance: tell the group plainly that next week is the end of the road and not to miss it.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group discovers Psalm 118:22 behind Peter's defense and states the exclusive claim of Acts 4:12 accurately and charitably, with CCC 847-848 in hand.
2. The group names the source of apostolic boldness: not temperament but the Spirit, evidenced by the same man's earlier collapse.
3. The group traces Cornelius as Peter's own ongoing conversion: God stretching the apostle years after Pentecost.
4. The group identifies the courtyard pattern at Antioch themselves, and states both precisions: conduct not teaching; corrected and correctable.
5. The group hears Acts 15:11 as the study's thesis in Peter's own words: saved through grace.

TIME NOTE

Core session runs about 85 minutes; four scenes. Keep Acts 4 and Acts 10 moving (twelve minutes each) to protect Antioch and the council. If long: cut the Dig Deeper and one Win question. **Do not cut** Question 5 or Question 6.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved, and we bless your name tonight. Give us the boldness you gave your apostle: not nerve, but your Spirit. Stretch us as you stretched him, wider than our comfort; correct us as you corrected him, and make us humble enough to take it; and keep converting us until the road ends. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Open questions; every answer is welcome.

W1. Have you ever had to say something true in front of people with power over you? What did it cost, and what carried you through (or stopped you)?

W2. Tell us about a time you were genuinely corrected by someone, fairly, in a way that stung. What did you do with it?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Acts 4:5-14

1. Look at verse 6: Annas the high priest and Caiaphas, by name. This is the court that condemned Jesus, sitting a few hundred yards from a certain courtyard. Standing before them, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” Peter builds his defense on a psalm: “This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner” (4:11).

Live discovery: say: “Find the psalm Peter is quoting: Psalm 118, verse 22, and read verses 22-24 in pairs. What is the psalm's story in one sentence, and why is it a devastating text to quote to THIS audience? And is there anything striking about THIS man preaching about a stone?” Let pairs report before the answer box.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The psalm's story: the stone the experts rejected turned out to be the cornerstone God chose; the rejection itself became part of the building plan, and “this is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in

our eyes.” Quoted to the Sanhedrin it is devastating because they are the builders: the credentialed rejecters, being told that their expert verdict was overruled by God three days after they issued it. And yes, the group should catch the wordplay of the ages: the man Jesus named Rock stands preaching the rejected Stone to the builders, himself Exhibit A of what God builds out of rejected material. Jesus had quoted this same psalm about Himself in the temple courts (Matthew 21:42); Peter learned his hermeneutic from the source.

2. Verse 12: “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” That is the most exclusive religious claim ever uttered, and our culture's least favorite sentence. Two questions: what exactly is Peter claiming? And how does the Church hold this claim together with her confidence that God desires all people to be saved, including those who never hear the name?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

What Peter claims: salvation is not a product category with competing brands; it is one act of God in one Person, crucified and risen, and every rescue that ever reaches any human being flows from that name (CCC 432 quotes this verse). What he does not claim: that God abandons those who never had a fair chance to hear it. The Church holds both edges deliberately (CCC 846-848): those who through no fault of their own do not know Christ or His Church, yet seek God sincerely and follow the truth they have, may be saved: but if they are, it is Christ who saves them, through His Church in ways known to God alone; there is no second staircase. And that hope removes exactly none of our commission, since the ordinary path God has revealed runs through hearing, faith, and baptism, which is why the same council-attending, threshold-crossing Peter spent his life announcing the name rather than resting in generalities. The claim is exclusive about the Savior and expansive about His reach; our culture usually reverses both.

3. Verse 13: the court “saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men... and they recognized that they had been with Jesus.” And verse 20: “we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” Where does boldness like this come from? Be careful: we know for a fact it is not this man's natural temperament.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

That is the trap the group must not fall into: calling Peter a naturally bold personality. The record says otherwise: this identical man was dismantled by a doorkeeper's question. The boldness (the New Testament's word is parrhesia: free, open, fearless speech) is the Spirit's gift, listed as such all over Acts, given to praying people: and the proof text is wonderful: when this same court threatens them, the church's prayer is not “keep us safe” but “grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness” (4:29), and the place is shaken. The court's own explanation stands forever as the credential that outranks credentials: they had been with Jesus. For the group: boldness is not a personality you have; it is a gift you ask for, and its fuel is witness (“what we have seen and heard”), which is why people with a real story to tell are so hard to shut up.

READ ALOUD: Acts 10:9-16, 25-28, 34-35, 44-48 (assign four readers in advance)

4. Years later, God is still working on Peter. Walk the Cornelius story: the sheet, “What God has cleansed, you must not call common,” the threshold of a Gentile house (“you yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with... any one of another nation,” 10:28), and the Spirit falling on the uncircumcised mid-sermon. What is God doing to His apostle here, and what does Peter's “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality” tell us about the Christian life after conversion?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

God is converting the converted. Peter is Spirit-filled, restored, the preacher of Pentecost, and he still carries formation-deep assumptions about who is inside the promise, so God dismantles one, patiently, with a vision repeated three times, a knock at the door, and finally the Spirit falling on Gentiles before Peter can finish his homily or impose a single precondition. “God shows no partiality” is Peter discovering the width of the very promise he preached at Pentecost (“all that are far off,” 2:39), and Isaiah's light to the nations reaching the end of the earth through his own reluctant hands. The lesson for the room: conversion is not an event you file; the Lord keeps stretching His people past their categories for the rest of their lives, usually in the direction of somebody they had quietly ruled out. It is worth asking the group gently: who is your Cornelius?

READ ALOUD: Galatians 2:11-14

5. Now the hard scene, and this study owes you total honesty. At Antioch, Peter had been eating freely with Gentile believers, until “certain men came from James.” Then, “fearing the circumcision party, he drew back and separated himself,” dragged others with him, and Paul “opposed him to his face.” Look at the mechanics of this failure very carefully. Where in Peter's story have we seen this exact pattern before?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Let the group find it; they will. Fear of men. Watching eyes arrive, and a man who knows the truth draws back from it publicly, and his drawing-back gives everyone else permission: it is the courtyard, decades later, in miniature: the servant girl's gaze has become “the circumcision party,” and the denial has become a quiet change of table. This is one of Scripture's most sobering gifts: the pattern that broke us does not retire when we are restored; it retires when we die, and vigilance against our own signature weakness is lifelong. Now the two precisions that keep this honest and hopeful at once. First: Peter's failure was conduct, not teaching: he never taught that Gentiles must judaize; he had proclaimed the opposite, and at the Jerusalem council of Acts 15 he teaches it on the record (whether Antioch came before or after the council is debated); he failed to live what he knew, which is hypocrisy (Paul's own word), not false doctrine, and the distinction matters for what the Church believes about his office. Second, the glory St. Cyprian saw: Galatians records the rebuke, not Peter's reply, but the Church's tradition from Cyprian onward reads the scene as Peter taking the correction: no rank pulled, no keys invoked; and Peter's later warmth toward “our beloved brother Paul” (2 Peter 3:15) suggests the correction landed. Being correctable is what ongoing conversion looks like from the inside; the group should ask which they fear more: falling

into the pattern, or being told they have.

READ ALOUD: Acts 15:7-11

6. The circumcision question comes to a council at Jerusalem, and Peter rises, recalls Cornelius, and ends with this: “But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (Acts 15:11). You have now watched this man's entire story. Why is that sentence, from THIS man, the perfect summary of everything this study has shown us?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Because every clause of it was paid for in scenes we have watched. Saved: by a hand on the water, a look in a courtyard, a fire on a beach. Through the grace of the Lord Jesus: not through Peter's nerve (it failed twice on the record), not through his credentials (uneducated, common), not through his ancestry (just as they will: the Gentiles, on identical terms): through grace, the word for everything he received and nothing he earned, from “you shall be called Rock” onward. The man who once boasted “I will lay down my life for you” now defines salvation with a sentence that has no self in it. When the group hears it, tell them plainly: this has been the study's hidden thesis since the first evening, waiting in the book of Acts for Peter to say it for us. Next week, we hear him say the rest, in his own letters, at the end of the road. Do not miss it.

DIG DEEPER: PARRHESIA

The Greek *parrhēsia* meant the citizen's right to speak freely in the assembly: open, fearless, unhedged speech. Acts uses it as the signature of the Spirit-filled Church, and the early Christians prayed for it by name (Acts 4:29). It is worth noticing what they did not pray for: safety, popularity, or persuasive technique. The Church's growth metric in Acts is not comfort; it is boldness plus witness, and the Lord added to their number.

DIG DEEPER: COULD PETER ERR AND STILL BE PETER?

Antioch has been argued over since the Fathers, precisely because it seems to press on Peter's office. The Church's settled instinct distinguishes the man's conduct from the shepherd's teaching: Peter behaved inconsistently with the Gospel; he did not bind the Church to error, and when the doctrinal question was actually posed at the council, he answered it with Acts 15:11. The office guards the deposit of faith; it never promised the officeholder a life without cowardice, which is, on reflection, the only kind of rock available: forgiven ones. Those who want the full biblical case for Peter's office should note it as a rich study of its own; tonight we stay with the man.

SEND: TAKING IT WITH YOU

S1. Who is your Cornelius: the person or kind of person you have quietly ruled outside the promise? What is one threshold-crossing step toward them this month?

S2. Your signature weakness, the courtyard pattern that is distinctly yours, does not retire. Who in your life has permission to oppose you to your face when it shows up, and if the answer is no one, whom will you give that permission this week?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray for boldness by name, once a day: "Lord, grant your servant to speak your word with all boldness." Then watch for the moment He supplies the occasion.
2. Take the first concrete step toward your Cornelius: an invitation, a conversation, a table shared.
3. Ask one trusted person to be your Paul: explicit permission to call out your signature pattern when they see it. Ongoing conversion is a team sport.
4. Next week is our final session. Bring your Bible, bring your surrender prayer, and come; the road ends somewhere worth seeing.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, there is no other name; we stake everything on yours. Give us boldness in front of the powerful, softness at the thresholds you send us across, and humility under correction. We believe that we shall be saved through your grace, just as every soul you are seeking tonight will be. Keep converting us until we see your face. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among

men by which we must be saved."

Acts 4:12 (RSV2CE)

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 11 and make next week's finale unmissable: "One session left. Every thread we have been carrying lands. Bring your surrender prayer."

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Texts

- Acts 4:5-22, before the Sanhedrin; the stone; no other name; boldness
- Acts 10:9-16, 25-28, 34-35, 44-48, Cornelius: the sheet, the threshold, the Spirit on the Gentiles
- Galatians 2:11-14, Antioch: the drawing back and the correction
- Acts 15:7-11, the council: saved through grace

Live Discovery Text

- Psalm 118:22-24, the rejected stone become the cornerstone

Supporting Texts

- Acts 4:29-31, the prayer for boldness answered
- Matthew 21:42, Jesus quotes the same psalm of Himself
- Isaiah 49:6, light to the nations
- Acts 2:39, all that are far off (callback)

Catechism

- CCC 432, no other name
- CCC 434, the name above every name
- CCC 846-848, the universal hope held with the exclusive claim
- CCC 1428, ongoing conversion

Memory Verse

- Acts 4:12

Take-Home 11: No Other Name

One session remains. Bring your Bible and your surrender prayer.

WHAT WE FOUND

We followed the apostle across two decades. Before the same court that condemned Jesus, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” he preached Psalm 118 to its face: the stone the builders rejected has become the head of the corner, the Rock preaching the rejected Stone to the builders. Then the claim on which everything stands: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The Church holds that exclusive claim together with her hope for those who, through no fault of their own, never heard the name, yet sincerely seek God and strive, moved by grace, to do his will as conscience makes it known (CCC 847-848): if they are saved, it is Christ who saves them; there is no second staircase. And the court supplied the credential that outranks credentials: “they had been with Jesus.” The boldness was not temperament (we know this man); it was the Spirit, given to people who pray for it.

At Cornelius' house, God was still converting the converted: the sheet, the threshold, the Spirit falling on Gentiles mid-sermon, and Peter's discovery: “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality.” Then Antioch, where this study owed you honesty: under the gaze of “the circumcision party,” Peter drew back from the Gentile tables, and we recognized the pattern ourselves: the courtyard, decades later: fear of men does not retire. His failure was conduct, not teaching, and its glory was that he took Paul's public correction without pulling rank: the rock stayed correctable. And at the council, the man who lived it all defined salvation for the record: “We believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (Acts 15:11): a sentence with no self in it, and the hidden thesis of this whole study.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage | *Epistle to Quintus*

Peter, whom the Lord chose first, did not insolently claim anything for himself when Paul disputed with him; he received the counsel of truth and readily agreed: a pattern of concord and patience, that we should not stubbornly love our own opinions but make truth's counsel our own.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Bede the Venerable | *Commentary on Acts*

What God has cleansed in the waters of baptism, no man may call common; the Spirit falling on the Gentiles showed that God's election runs ahead of human gatekeeping. The door of faith swung open to the nations through the hands of the fisherman, exactly as the keys had promised.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom / *Homilies on Acts*

Unlettered men silenced the supreme court of their nation, and the court itself explained it: they had been with Jesus. Boldness of this kind is not temperament; it is the Spirit's gift, given to the praying, who when threatened did not ask for safety but for more boldness still.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray for boldness by name, once a day: "Lord, grant your servant to speak your word with all boldness" (adapted from Acts 4:29). Watch for the occasion He supplies.
2. Take the first concrete step toward your Cornelius: an invitation, a conversation, a table shared.
3. Ask one trusted person to be your Paul: explicit permission to call out your signature pattern when they see it.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

*"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among
men by which we must be saved."*

Acts 4:12 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION (THE FINALE)

Read **1 Peter 1:3-9** and **1 Peter 5:1-11**: the voice of the man we have walked with, near the end of the road. Bring your Bible and your surrender prayer. Every thread lands next week.

Catechism references from tonight: CCC 432, 847-848, 1428.

Session 12: Stretch Out Your Hands

1 Peter (selections) and John 21:18-19 | 90 minutes by design | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group mines Peter's own letter for his hidden autobiography, discovering his whole story transposed into encouragement for the churches: the towel, the sifting, the stone, the shame, the strengthening. They hear the martyrdom tradition told honestly, hear "afterward" arrive, watch the three fires assemble into Zechariah's refining, and receive the study's final "Follow me" as their own commissioning.

Catholic Touchstone: Martyrdom is the supreme witness to the truth of the faith (CCC 2473), and hope is the virtue by which we desire and await eternal life, trusting Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength but on the grace of the Holy Spirit (CCC 1817). Peter's last word to the Church is a living hope, and his last act was to follow.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The session's engine is one large live discovery (Question 2): the group, in assigned pairs, hunts Peter's own story inside his exhortations. Prepare slips or assignments in advance; the leader's role during the hunt is to circulate and grin. On authorship, model the study's standing honesty: the letter presents itself as from "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ," written "through Silvanus" (1 Peter 5:12); the Church receives it as the apostle's witness; some scholars question whether a Galilean fisherman produced its polished Greek, and the Silvanus note is the traditional and reasonable answer (a trusted secretary shaping dictation was normal ancient practice). Say all of this plainly if asked; hedge nothing and overclaim nothing. Either way, what your group will discover in Question 2 is its own kind of internal resonance: the letter is haunted, in detail after detail, by the biography this study has walked.

The assignments and what the pairs should find (full key in the answer box): (a) 1 Peter 5:5-6, "clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility": the Greek verb *egkomboōsasthe* means to tie on like an apron or servant's garment, a word many readers have heard as the Upper Room remembered: the old man who watched God tie on a towel now tells the whole Church to dress like that; offer the connection as cherished and possible, not proven. (b) 1 Peter 5:8-9, "your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion... Resist him, firm in your faith": the man once sifted now warns of the sifter, and prescribes exactly what was prayed for him: faith that does not fail. (c) 1 Peter 2:4-7, the living Stone, rejected by men, chosen and precious, with Psalm 118:22 quoted in full: the Rock is still turning over the Stone

psalm he preached to the Sanhedrin, and he now calls every believer a living stone in the same house. (d) 1 Peter 1:8, “Without having seen him you love him”: the man who was asked “do you love me?” at a fire marvels at Christians who answer yes without ever having had a shoreline breakfast. (e) 1 Peter 5:10, “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace... will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you”: Luke 22:32 resolved in his own handwriting: the turned-again man spending his ink, near the road's end, strengthening the brethren, promising them the same restoration he received. (f) 1 Peter 2:24, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree”: Session 4 resolved: the man who said “God forbid” now preaches the cross he once refused, in Isaiah 53's own vocabulary. (g) 1 Peter 4:16, “if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed”: from the man who was once ashamed before a servant girl.

Then the road's end, told honestly in two registers. Strongly attested history: the ancient Church universally held, and never contradicted, that Peter died a martyr in Rome, traditionally under Nero in the persecution after the great fire of 64. The witnesses are early and converge, each supplying a piece: St. Clement of Rome, writing to Corinth around 96, within living memory, on Peter's martyr witness (1 Clement 5); St. Ignatius of Antioch on Peter's authority at Rome (to the Romans, c. 107: “I do not command you as Peter and Paul did”); St. Irenaeus on Peter and Paul preaching and founding the church in Rome; Dionysius of Corinth (c. 170, preserved in Eusebius) stating plainly that both were martyred; and Eusebius preserving the Roman priest Gaius (c. 200) pointing to the “trophy” (monuments) of the apostles on the Vatican hill: the spot over which St. Peter's Basilica stands, where twentieth-century excavations found a second-century shrine built over a simple early grave that Christians had venerated from ancient times. John 21:18-19 was written by a man who knew how the prophecy had been kept. Venerable tradition, clearly labeled: the *Quo Vadis* story comes from the apocryphal Acts of Peter (second century), not from Scripture, and its details are not certain history: fleeing the persecution, Peter meets Christ walking into the city and asks, *Domine, quo vadis?* (Lord, where are you going?), and hears: I am going to Rome to be crucified again: and Peter turns around. Tell it as the Church has always told it, as a story too true to the man not to keep; and then WAIT: the group should hear the echo themselves (Question 4): Peter has asked that question before, at a table, and was promised: “you shall follow afterward” (John 13:36). Afterward has arrived. Origen, preserved in Eusebius, reports that he was crucified head-down at his own request; the motive tradition supplies, that he counted himself unworthy to die exactly as his Lord, comes from later writers (St. Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 1). Label both likewise.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Zechariah 13:9, gathered tonight. The refining oracle the group discovered in Session 7 finally shows its full work: three fires stand along Peter's road: the courtyard fire where the ore cracked open, the shore fire where love was spoken back, and the Pentecost fire that sent him. “I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver... They will call on my name, and I will answer them.” Question 5 lets the group assemble this themselves.

Isaiah 43:1-2. “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you... when you walk through fire you shall not be burned.” Water and fire: the man's whole geography; supply it near the close.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Clement of Rome / *Letter to the Corinthians (1 Clement), Chapter 5 (c. 96 AD)*

Writing from Rome within living memory, St. Clement points to “the noble examples of our own generation”: Peter, who through unrighteous jealousy endured not one or two but many labors, and having thus borne his witness, went to the glorious place which was his due. It is the earliest surviving reference to Peter's martyrdom, written by a man leading the very church in which it happened, and it treats the fact as something his readers already know.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

Cataloguing the churches' apostolic pedigrees, St. Irenaeus states as common knowledge that Matthew wrote while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome and laying the foundations of the Church there. A student of St. Polycarp, who knew St. John, Irenaeus stands two handshakes from the apostles; for him Peter's Roman ministry is not legend but the documented foundation of the Church's most visible see.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Leo the Great / *Sermon 82 (on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul)*

Preaching in Rome on the apostles' feast, St. Leo tells the city that its true glory is not its empire but its martyrs: these are the men who brought you the Gospel, and through the see of blessed Peter placed at the head, a city once mistress of error became a disciple of the truth. Rome's conquests reached fewer places by war, Leo says, than Peter's witness has reached by peace: the fisherman's last catch was the capital of the world.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 2473:** Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: the martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he is united by charity, enduring death through an act of fortitude.
- **CCC 1817:** Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. The letter's own name for itself: a living hope (1 Peter 1:3).

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND): TONIGHT IT IS TAUGHT ALOUD

THE WHOLE WAY, IN PETER'S OWN LETTER (LEADER MAP FOR QUESTION 6)

Twelve weeks of leader-only strand boxes surface tonight, in the group's hands, because Peter

wrote the whole way of salvation into one short letter. The map, if you need it: God acts first (1:3, “he has caused us to be born anew”); through the cross (2:24, planted in Session 4, found tonight); as sheer grace (1:8-9, faith and love for the unseen Christ; 5:10, the God of all grace); through faith that clings under trial (1:6-7, faith more precious than gold tested by fire); received in baptism (3:21, “Baptism... now saves you,” planted in Session 10); lived in the Church under shepherds (5:1-4, Peter the fellow elder; 2:9, a royal priesthood); through lifelong vigilance (5:8, the prowling lion); unto living hope and unfading glory (1:3-4; 5:10). If the group assembles even half of this in Question 6, the study has done its work. This is the last strand box.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY): THE FINAL LEDGER

- **“Afterward” arrives.** John 13:36, planted in Session 6, resolves in Question 4, and it must be the GROUP that hears “Lord, where are you going?” echo. Ask; wait.
- **The three fires assemble.** Courtyard, shore, Pentecost: Zechariah 13:9’s refining, revealed at last in Question 5. If someone found it early in Session 10, honor them by name tonight.
- **Luke 22:32 in his handwriting.** Restore, establish, strengthen (5:10): assignment (e). Let the pair who finds it read the Luke verse aloud beside it.
- **1 Peter 2:24 resolves Session 4.** The “God forbid” man preaching the tree. Assignment (f).
- **The towel remembered.** Egkomboomai, assignment (a): the study’s tenderest possible echo; present it as cherished, not certain.
- **The name, finally.** The letter opens “Peter, an apostle”: the given name, worn like a fulfilled prophecy. If a participant notes that 2 Peter opens “Simeon Peter,” both names to the end, delight in it.
- **“Follow me” bookends the study itself.** The commissioning at the close hands the words to the group. That is the study’s whole aim; land it gently.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group discovers Peter’s autobiography inside 1 Peter through the paired hunt and reports every find.
2. The group hears the martyrdom tradition with its evidence, and the Quo Vadis story honestly labeled, and discovers the John 13:36 echo themselves.
3. The group assembles the three fires into Zechariah’s refining oracle.
4. The group articulates the whole way of salvation from Peter’s letter.
5. Each participant receives the final “Follow me” and names where into the deep points next for them; the study closes with commissioning.

TIME NOTE

Plan the full 90 minutes; this is the finale. If trimming is forced: shorten Win to one question and compress Question 6's assembly. **Do not cut** the paired hunt, the Quo Vadis moment, or the commissioning.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: by his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope. Lord, tonight we reach the end of the road we have walked with your servant Simon Peter. Let us hear his voice one last time, in his own letter; let us see how you kept every promise you made him; and then say to each of us what you said to him at the beginning and at the end: Follow me. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Keep Win brief; the finale is full.

W1. If you could read one letter written by someone you love near the end of their life, what would you hope to find in it?

W2. Looking back over these twelve weeks: what is one moment from Peter's story that has stuck to you personally?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: 1 Peter 1:3-9

1. Listen to the voice: "Born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory." An old man is writing to persecuted churches he has never met. Knowing his whole story as you now do, what do you hear underneath these sentences?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

You hear a man describing his own case history as if it were doctrine, because for him it is both. Born anew: he was remade on a beach. A living hope through the resurrection: hope, for Peter, is not optimism; it is what walked out of a tomb and came looking for him by name. Faith tested by fire and found genuine: he is the specimen; his faith went into a literal fire's light and failed, and into a refiner's fire and came out gold, exactly as an old oracle promised. Even "for a little while"

carries a survivor's perspective: the man measuring trials against “an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” has learned the arithmetic from decades of walking. Tonight we are going to find his fingerprints all over this letter.

2. Here is the finale's great hunt. Peter almost never mentions himself in this letter, and yet readers have always felt his story pressing through every page.

Live discovery (the session's engine; give it generous time): assign one passage per pair and say: “You have walked twelve weeks with this man. Read your passage and hunt: where is Peter's own story hiding inside his advice? Report what you find and defend it.” Assignments: (a) 1 Peter 5:5-6; (b) 1 Peter 5:8-9; (c) 1 Peter 2:4-7; (d) 1 Peter 1:8; (e) 1 Peter 5:10, read beside Luke 22:31-32; (f) 1 Peter 2:24, read beside Isaiah 53:4-6; (g) 1 Peter 4:16. Let every pair report fully before the answer box; celebrate each find.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

(a) “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility”: the Greek verb means to tie on like a servant's apron. Many readers across the centuries have heard the Upper Room in that word: the old man who watched God tie on a towel telling the whole Church to dress like that. Cherished and possible, not provable: and either way the instruction is the towel's. (b) “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion... Resist him, firm in your faith”: the sifted man warns of the sifter, and prescribes precisely what Jesus prayed for him: faith that does not fail. He adds, tellingly, that your brotherhood throughout the world suffers the same: the strengthener of brethren at work. (c) The living Stone, rejected by men, chosen and precious, with Psalm 118:22 quoted in full: the Rock never stopped turning over the Stone psalm, from the Sanhedrin to this page, and now he deals every believer into the masonry: you also, like living stones. (d) “Without having seen him you love him”: from the man who was asked “do you love me?” across a breakfast fire, a sentence of open wonder at Christians who answer yes without ever having had his advantages. (e) “The God of all grace... will himself RESTORE, ESTABLISH, and STRENGTHEN you”: set Luke 22:32 beside it and read both aloud: “when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.” He turned again; this letter, written toward the end of his road, is the strengthening: and he promises the fallen the same triple mercy he received. (f) “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree... by his wounds you have been healed”: the man who said “God forbid” to the cross now preaches it in Isaiah 53's own vocabulary: the resolution of Session 4, in his handwriting. (g) “If one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed”: from the man once ashamed before a servant girl: he knows precisely what he is asking, and precisely that it can be healed.

3. One honest question before the road's end, because this study owes you the whole truth: the letter says it was written “through Silvanus” (5:12), and some scholars have wondered whether a Galilean fisherman could produce Greek this polished. What do we actually know, and how should a Catholic hold questions like this?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Hold them the way this study has held everything: with honesty and without fear. The letter names

its author (“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ”) and its scribe or courier (“through Silvanus, a faithful brother”), and dictating through a trusted, educated secretary who shaped the wording was utterly normal ancient practice: Paul did the same (Romans 16:22). The Church receives the letter as the apostle’s witness, and the earliest Christians never doubted it. Scholars who question it point to the Greek style; the Silvanus note is the traditional and entirely reasonable answer, and the Church has not bound consciences on the mechanics. And tonight’s hunt adds its own quiet resonance: the letter reads, in verb choices and obsessions and scars, like the specific biography we have spent twelve weeks walking: not a proof that settles the scholars’ question, but a consonance the Church has always heard. Whoever held the pen, the voice is the shepherd’s.

READ ALOUD: John 21:18-19, reread slowly

4. “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.)” It is time to hear how the prophecy was kept. **LEADER:** tell the road’s end now, in two clearly labeled registers. First the strongly attested history: Rome; Nero’s persecution after the great fire of 64; martyrdom attested within living memory by St. Clement of Rome (1 Clement 5), by St. Ignatius, by St. Irenaeus, and by the Roman priest Gaius pointing visitors to the apostle’s monument on the Vatican hill, the very spot beneath the high altar of St. Peter’s today, where excavations found a second-century shrine built over a simple early grave that Christians had venerated from ancient times. Then, clearly labeled as venerable tradition from the apocryphal Acts of Peter, not Scripture and not certain history: the Quo Vadis story. Fleeing the persecution at his friends’ urging, Peter meets Christ on the road, walking toward the city, and asks: Domine, quo vadis: Lord, where are you going? And the answer: I am going to Rome to be crucified again. And Peter turns around. **THEN** ask the group, and wait: where have we heard Peter ask that exact question before, and what was he promised?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Wait for the intake of breath. John 13:36, the night of the towel: “Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, where are you going?’ Jesus answered, ‘Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward.’” The apocryphal story, whatever its historicity, understood the man perfectly, because it is built on the canonical promise: there was an appointment named “afterward,” made before the fall, kept after a lifetime. On the Quo Vadis road, afterward arrived: the “cannot” of the boasting young man had become the “can” of the surrendered old one, and this time nobody had to tell him about roosters. Origen, preserved in Eusebius, reports that he was crucified head-down at his own request; later writers (St. Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 1) supply the motive, that he counted himself unworthy to die exactly as his Lord. Label both likewise, and notice only that it is the request of a man permanently done with comparisons. The whole study closes in those two words from the beach: he was told “Follow me,” and he followed, all the way, and the death did what John said it would: it glorified God (CCC 2473: martyrdom, the supreme witness). The Church that buried him built her most famous altar over the spot, and the fisherman’s grave anchors the skyline of the city that killed him.

5. Now step all the way back. Across this study, fire has kept appearing at the hinges of Peter's story. Count the fires with me, and then read Zechariah 13:9 one last time: "I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them." What do you see?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Let the group assemble it; they have all the pieces. Fire one: the charcoal fire in the courtyard, where the ore cracked open and the boast burned off. Fire two: the charcoal fire on the shore, where love was spoken back three times and the wound healed at its own coordinates. Fire three: the tongues of fire at Pentecost, where the refined silver was poured out for the world. One oracle, discovered the very night of the fall, held all three in advance: the striking, the scattering, the refining, and the reunion: "they will call on my name, and I will answer them": which he did, from the waves to the courtyard to the shore, and which three thousand did in one morning because he told them they could. God wastes no fires. The ones in your own story, including the ones still burning, can become refiner's fires in the hands of the same Goldsmith; God does not send every fire, but he wastes none of them: and Peter himself wrote you the promise: faith tested by fire, more precious than gold, unto praise and glory (1 Peter 1:7).

6. Last question of the study. Twelve weeks ago we asked what it would take for Simon to become the rock. You have now watched the whole answer. So, from everything you have seen, and using Peter's own letter where you can: what IS the way of salvation? How does a person actually come to be saved, held, and brought home? Build it together, out loud.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Let the group construct it; steer only as needed, and let them cite the letter: God acts first, in sheer mercy: "he has caused us to be born anew" (1:3): nobody climbs out of the boat of the old life unsummoned. Through the cross: "he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (2:24): there is no bypass around Golgotha, for Christ or for us. Received, not earned: "the God of all grace" (5:10), "saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 15:11): grace from the first net to the last breath. Through faith that clings: loving Him unseen, believing Him half-understood (1:8; John 6:68), tested by fire and held by His intercession, not our grip. Entered through the waters: "Baptism... now saves you" (3:21): Peter's own pen, closing the loop from Acts 2:38. Lived in the Church: living stones in one house (2:5), a flock under shepherds (5:1-4), at the table, in the prayers (Acts 2:42). Guarded by vigilance and mercy together: the lion still prowls (5:8), falls still happen, and the God of all grace still restores, establishes, strengthens (5:10). Unto a living hope: an inheritance unfading, guarded in heaven, for people guarded by grace (1:4-5). That is the deep Christ meant when He said: put out into it.

THE COMMISSIONING

THE FINAL SEND (LEADER SCRIPT)

Say: “Twelve weeks ago, on a beach, this study began with two words spoken to a fisherman: Follow me. On another beach, after everything, the same two words closed his restoration, and he followed them all the way to a hill in Rome. Tonight they are spoken to you. Take out your surrender prayer from the shore. Read it silently one more time. Then, underneath it, write one sentence: where 'into the deep' points next for you: the mission, the person, the vocation, the conversation, the next yes. Nobody will collect it. When you have written it, we will stand and be sent.” Allow quiet minutes. Then stand, and pray the closing prayer together as a commissioning. If your group's custom allows, end with a blessing and, ideally, plan to attend one Mass together as the study's true finale: the breaking of the bread, where all of this lives.

DIG DEEPER: THE BONES UNDER THE ALTAR

In 1939, workers preparing Pope Pius XI's tomb beneath St. Peter's uncovered a Roman necropolis. Excavations found, directly beneath the basilica's high altar, a small second-century shrine (matching Gaius' “trophy”) built against a graffiti-covered wall over a simple first-century grave: and within the wall, bones of a robustly built man of about sixty to seventy years, wrapped in purple and gold cloth, an identification proposed by the excavation's epigrapher and still debated. In 1968, St. Paul VI announced that the relics of St. Peter had been identified in a manner the Church considers convincing. Certainty of the archaeological kind is elusive; what is firmly established is that Christians were honoring exactly that spot as Peter's memorial by the mid-second century, on a hill where there was every reason not to invent it.

DIG DEEPER: SIMEON PETER

The second letter bearing his name opens with both names at once: “Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1), the old Hebrew name and the given rock-name side by side, and adds: “the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me” (1:14): an old man remembering a sentence spoken over breakfast. Simon did not stop existing when Peter was born; grace does not erase the fisherman, it fulfills him. Both names go into glory together.

SEND: THE STUDY'S LAST QUESTIONS

S1. Where does “into the deep” point next for you: the one concrete yes you wrote under your surrender prayer? Say it to one person before you leave tonight.

S2. Peter strengthened his brethren to his last page. Who will you strengthen with what these twelve weeks have given you, and when does that start?

LIVE IT FROM HERE

1. Read 1 Peter whole, in one sitting, this week: twenty minutes, start to finish, hearing the voice you now know. Then read it again in a month.
2. Act on your “into the deep” sentence within seven days: the first step, however small, before the resolve cools.
3. Keep the memory verses. Twelve of them now live in you; pray one each week for the next twelve weeks, and let the arc replay.
4. Stay at the fire: Mass, and (if Catholic) regular Confession: the charcoal fire rebuilt for you, as often as you need it, until your own afterward arrives.

CLOSING PRAYER (THE COMMISSIONING)

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God: you called us from our boats, you taught us on the water, you washed us though we protested, you kept every appointment we broke, you rebuilt our fires, and you have asked us, as many times as it took: do you love me? Lord, you know everything; you know that we love you. By the grace that made a rock out of a fisherman, send us now into the deep: to the lambs you are handing us, to the Corneliuses we had ruled out, to the city that does not yet know your name. We hold the living hope; we will not be ashamed; and when you say Follow me, by your grace, we will follow: all the way, and afterward. 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)

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 12, thank every person by name if the group's size allows, and if at all possible, set the date now for the group's Mass together.

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Texts

- 1 Peter 1:3-9, born anew to a living hope; faith tested by fire
- 1 Peter 5:12, through Silvanus (authorship honesty)
- John 21:18-19, the prophecy of the stretched-out hands, reread

The Hunt (assigned pairs)

- (a) 1 Peter 5:5-6, clothe yourselves with humility (the towel verb)
- (b) 1 Peter 5:8-9, the prowling lion (the sifting)
- (c) 1 Peter 2:4-7, the living Stone and Psalm 118:22
- (d) 1 Peter 1:8, without having seen him you love him
- (e) 1 Peter 5:10 beside Luke 22:31-32, restore, establish, strengthen
- (f) 1 Peter 2:24 beside Isaiah 53:4-6, he bore our sins on the tree
- (g) 1 Peter 4:16, suffering as a Christian, unashamed

Threads Gathered

- John 13:36, “you shall follow afterward” (resolved at Quo Vadis)
- Zechariah 13:9, the refining fire (three fires assembled)
- 1 Peter 3:21, baptism now saves you (Acts 2:38 loop closed; strand map)
- Acts 15:11, saved through grace (recalled from Session 11)

The Martyrdom Witness (tell in labeled registers)

- Solid history: 1 Clement 5; St. Ignatius to the Romans; St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies III.1; Gaius' “trophy” preserved in Eusebius; the Vatican hill excavations
- Venerable tradition, labeled: Quo Vadis (apocryphal Acts of Peter); the head-down crucifixion (Origen via Eusebius); the unworthiness motive (later tradition, e.g., Jerome)

Catechism

- CCC 2473, martyrdom the supreme witness
- CCC 1817, hope

Memory Verse

- 1 Peter 5:10

Take-Home 12: Stretch Out Your Hands

The final session. Thank you for walking the whole road.

WHAT WE FOUND

We opened the old man's letter and found his whole life hiding inside his advice. "Clothe yourselves with humility": a verb that means to tie on like a servant's apron, from the man who watched God tie on a towel. "Your adversary the devil prowls like a roaring lion": from the man who was sifted like wheat. The living Stone and Psalm 118, from the Rock who never stopped turning that psalm over. "Without having seen him you love him": wonder, from the man who was asked "do you love me?" across a breakfast fire. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree": the cross preached by the man who once said "God forbid." "Let him not be ashamed": from the man once ashamed before a servant girl. And the letter's crown: "The God of all grace... will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you" (1 Peter 5:10): Luke 22:32 kept, in his own letter: he turned again, and his last words strengthen the brethren.

Then the road's end, in two honest registers. History: Peter was martyred in Rome, his death attested within living memory (1 Clement 5, c. 96 AD) and confirmed by the converging early tradition: St. Ignatius, St. Irenaeus, and the second-century monument on Vatican hill beneath the basilica's altar. The tradition, going back to Tertullian and Dionysius of Corinth, places the martyrdom under Nero. And the venerable Quo Vadis tradition, from outside Scripture but true to the man: fleeing Rome, he met Christ walking in and asked, "Lord, where are you going?": and we heard the echo ourselves: he had asked it once before, at the table, and been promised: "you shall follow afterward" (John 13:36). Afterward arrived, and he turned around. We counted the three fires: courtyard, shore, Pentecost: an echo of Zechariah's refining fire (Zechariah 13:9) traced through his story: and we built the whole way of salvation out of his own letter: born anew by mercy, through the cross, by grace, through clinging faith, in baptism, within the Church, vigilant and hoped-for to the end. Then the two words came to us: Follow me.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Clement of Rome | 1 Clement 5 (c. 96 AD)

Peter endured not one or two but many labors, and having thus borne his witness, went to the glorious place which was his due: the earliest record of the martyrdom, written from Rome within living memory.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

Peter and Paul preached at Rome and laid the foundations of the Church there: stated as common knowledge by a man two handshakes from the apostles.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Leo the Great / *Sermon 82*

Rome's true glory is not its empire but its martyrs: through the see of blessed Peter, a city once mistress of error became a disciple of the truth: Leo's boast for the apostles; one might say the fisherman's last catch was the capital of the world.

WHERE THE ROAD CONTINUES

1. Read 1 Peter whole, in one sitting, this week; hear the voice you now know. Read it again in a month.
2. Act on your “into the deep” sentence within seven days, before the resolve cools, and tell one person what it is.
3. Keep the twelve memory verses: one each week for the next twelve weeks, and let the arc replay in you.
4. Stay at the fire: Sunday Mass, and (if Catholic) regular Confession: the charcoal fire rebuilt for you as often as you need it. And when the group gathers for Mass together, be there: the breaking of the bread is where this study was always headed.

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)

A LAST WORD

Twelve weeks ago you wrote a guess about what it would take to turn Simon into the rock. Keep that sheet, with your surrender prayer on it, somewhere you will find it in a few years. The answer it records is the one the Church has staked everything on: not the rock becoming harder, but the rock becoming His. *Duc in altum*. Put out into the deep.