

Session 8: A Royal Priesthood

A Kingdom of Priests: Priesthood in the New Covenant

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Tonight the pendulum swings, hard and on purpose. After three sessions on what Christ gave the apostles, the group opens 1 Peter 2 and hears the words they memorized on the first night spoken to the whole Church: "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." The title of this study lands on the page. The aim is double: first, that every person in the room walks out KNOWING they are a priest, with real sacrifices to offer (their bodies, their work, their praise, their suffering: Romans 12:1, Hebrews 13:15 to 16); second, that the group discovers, from 1 Peter itself and from the Old Testament they now know well, why the royal priesthood of all the baptized was never a contradiction of ordained ministry, because it never was in Israel, and the letter that proclaims it is written by an officer of the Church who addresses other officers in its final chapter. Both priesthoods at full strength, differing essentially and ordered to one another, with no rivalry: that is the Catholic claim, and tonight the group assembles it themselves.

Catholic Touchstone

The Catechism teaches that the whole community of believers is, as such, priestly, exercising its baptismal priesthood through the offering of prayer, thanksgiving, witness, and holiness of life (CCC 1546, drawing on Lumen Gentium); and that the ministerial priesthood differs essentially from the common priesthood, not as higher rank in a spiritual aristocracy, but as a different KIND of participation in Christ's one priesthood, existing AT THE SERVICE of the common priesthood, directed at its unfolding (CCC 1547). The laity's sacrifices are named without embarrassment: their work, prayers, apostolic endeavors, family life, daily labor, hardships patiently borne, all become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, offered especially in the Eucharist (CCC 901). Tonight is the session where the study's title becomes the group's identity.

What You Need to Know

Read 1 Peter 2:4 to 10 until you can hear its architecture. Christ is the living stone, rejected by men, chosen and precious to God; and those who come to him are themselves living stones, "built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Then verse 9 detonates the study's title: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." Every phrase is harvested from the Old Testament, and the central one is your group's first memory verse: Exodus 19:6, quoted nearly verbatim (by way of its Greek translation). Peter is announcing that the vocation spoken at Sinai, in this study's traced reading wounded at the calf and held under Levi's guardianship, is proclaimed by Peter as the identity of the whole Church in Christ. The kingdom-of-priests destiny was never revoked; it was waiting for the Priest. When your group recognizes their own memory verse on the page, and they will, without help, let the moment breathe. It is the single largest recognition of the study.

Then make the priesthood concrete, because "spiritual sacrifices" can evaporate into a compliment if you let it. What do baptized priests actually offer? The group discovers Romans 12:1 live: "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship": the body, the whole embodied life, laid on the altar. Hebrews 13:15 to 16 names more: "a sacrifice of praise... the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name," and "do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." The Catechism completes the inventory for the lay faithful (CCC 901): work, prayer, family life, hardships patiently borne. Press it into their actual week: the spreadsheet finished with integrity, the diaper changed at 3 a.m., the

illness carried without bitterness, offered through Christ, are priestly acts. This is not a consolation prize for the unordained; it is Exodus 19:6, paid in full.

Now the steelman, and it deserves its full historic weight: "1 Peter 2:9 is the Reformation's verse. Every believer is a priest: so the medieval machinery of a separate priestly caste was exactly the kind of thing this verse abolishes. Rome took a gift addressed to all and locked it in a sanctuary." Two discoveries answer it, both made by the group. First, the Old Testament one they can now make from memory: Exodus 19:6 was spoken to a nation that, within months, ALSO had an ordained priesthood at God's explicit command; in Israel, universal priestly vocation and ordained priestly office coexisted from the beginning, by design. Quoting Israel's vocation verse cannot abolish ordained ministry, because it never did the first time; Korah made a closely analogous appeal ("all the congregation are holy!") and the group already knows how God answered it. Second, the New Testament discovery: 1 Peter ITSELF. The letter proclaiming the royal priesthood opens "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ" and closes with "So I exhort the ELDERS among you, as a fellow elder... Tend the flock of God that is your charge" (1 Peter 5:1 to 4): the universal-priesthood letter is written by an officer, to churches that have officers, with instructions for the officers. Peter saw no tension because there is none: the shepherds exist FOR the priestly flock (CCC 1547: at the service of the common priesthood), and the flock's priesthood is the point of the shepherds' work. One more exegetical honesty, which strengthens rather than weakens: the "you" of 1 Peter 2:9 is corporate, a people, a race, a nation, a house; the verse crowns the Church as a priestly PEOPLE rather than distributing private chaplaincies to individuals. That corporate shape is exactly Exodus 19:6's shape, and it is why the verse and ordained ministry have never collided in Catholic reading: the ministerial priesthood serves precisely to build the priestly house.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight is Thread D's great harvest: Exodus 19:6, planted as the first memory verse, discovered by the group inside 1 Peter 2:9. Revelation 1:5 to 6 extends it ("made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father"), and you will hold its full resolution for Session 12, where the study's last page returns to it in glory. Thread C also pays out quietly: "a chosen race... God's own people" is firstborn-nation language (Exodus 4:22) restored in the Firstborn.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Leo the Great

On the first night of this study, you met St. Leo and were told he would matter tonight. Here he is: preaching to ordinary baptized Christians, Leo teaches in substance that all who are reborn in Christ share a royal and priestly dignity, for the sign of the cross makes them a kingly people and the anointing of the Holy Spirit consecrates them as priests; every Christian, he insists, should recognize this dignity in himself. A pope, in the fifth century, telling the whole congregation they are royal priests: 1 Peter 2:9 was never a lost verse the Reformation recovered; it was the Church's own preaching all along. (A summary of Leo's teaching.)

Sermon 4

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

"The whole redeemed city, that is, the congregation and society of the saints, is offered to God as a universal sacrifice through the great High Priest." Augustine, in the same chapter of the City of God this study has returned to twice, gives the royal priesthood its grandest sentence: the Church herself, the whole of us together, is the offering, carried through the one Priest. Your life is not beside the sacrifice; it

is in it.

City of God, Book 10, chapter 6

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thérèse of Lisieux

St. Thérèse teaches, in substance, that holiness is not the property of great deeds: the smallest acts, a difficult person loved, a hidden chore done, a discomfort accepted without complaint, become great offerings when done with great love. She is the royal priesthood's field manual. If "spiritual sacrifices" ever sounds abstract, Thérèse is the saint who shows what it looks like on an ordinary Tuesday. (A summary of the heart of her *Story of a Soul*.)

Story of a Soul

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1546: Christ has made the Church a kingdom of priests; the whole community of believers is, as such, priestly, and the faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood in prayer, thanksgiving, witness, and holiness of life.
- CCC 1547: the ministerial priesthood differs ESSENTIALLY from the common priesthood of the faithful, and it is AT THE SERVICE of the common priesthood; both participate, each in its own way, in the one priesthood of Christ.
- CCC 901: the laity's works, prayers, family life, daily labor, and hardships patiently borne become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, offered with the Lord's body in the Eucharist.

Thread Watch (leader only)

- THREAD D (kingdom of priests): the great harvest is tonight; the FULL resolution (Revelation, the liturgy of heaven, the study's last word) is Session 12. Harvest without closing.
- THREAD C (the firstborn): "chosen race... God's own people" restores the firstborn-nation identity; one sentence, or save it entirely for Session 12.
- THREAD B (serve and guard): 1 Peter 5:2, "Tend the flock of God that is your charge," is the guard-thread in pastoral form; a quiet setup for Session 10.
- THREAD A (resolved): the Melchizedek image can serve tonight if useful: the priestly PEOPLE offers its life through the Priest whose offering is on the altar.

Session Goals

1. The group recognizes Exodus 19:6 inside 1 Peter 2:9 unaided, and can narrate the vocation's arc: spoken at Sinai, wounded at the calf, restored in Christ.
2. Every participant can name at least two concrete sacrifices their own baptismal priesthood offers this week.
3. The Reformation steelman is stated with full historic weight and answered by the group's two discoveries: Israel held both priesthoods by design, and 1 Peter itself is an officer's letter that addresses officers.
4. The corporate shape of the "you" in 1 Peter 2:9 is stated honestly.
5. No one leaves thinking the common priesthood is a metaphor or a consolation prize. It is the study's title, and it is theirs.

Timed Plan (90 minutes)

- 0:00 Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)
- 0:05 Win questions (10 min)
- 0:15 Build I: Living stones and the recognition, 1 Peter 2:4 to 10 (25 min)
- 0:40 Build II: What do we offer, Romans 12 and Hebrews 13 (15 min)
- 0:55 Build III: The Reformation steelman (20 min)
- 1:15 Send (10 min)
- 1:25 Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min)

Pre-chosen cuts for a 75-minute room: drop the Dig Deeper and compress Build II by reading Romans 12:1 yourself and moving straight to the inventory question. Never cut the recognition moment or the 1 Peter 5 discovery.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, you called a people out of darkness into your marvelous light and named them priests. Tonight, read our own name to us from your word, and give us the honesty to believe what you call us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. Was there a moment someone older named something in you ("you are a leader," "you are an artist," "you are good with people") and the naming itself changed you? What did being NAMED do that the ability alone had not?
2. What is a group you belong to where the belonging itself, not your individual role, is the point? What does that kind of belonging give you?

Build I: Living Stones

Read 1 Peter 2:4 to 10 aloud, divided around the room, and tell everyone to circle any phrase they have seen before, anywhere, in this study. Do not say more than that.

Q1. What did you circle? Where have you seen it, exactly?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The room should find it: "a royal priesthood, a holy nation" is Exodus 19:6, their first memory verse, the words of Sinai, quoted by Peter (by way of the Greek Old Testament) and spoken now to the whole Church. Some will also circle "chosen race" and "God's own people" (Exodus 19:5, "my own possession"). Let the recognition land fully before analyzing. Then ask them to narrate the arc themselves: spoken at Sinai; conditioned on covenant; wounded at the golden calf and, in the reading this study has traced, placed under Levi's guardianship; promised through the prophets; and now, on the far side of the Priest for ever and his one sacrifice, proclaimed by Peter over the whole Church, everyone in this room included. The study's title was never decoration. It is the plot.

Q2. Verse 5 says what this priestly people is FOR: "to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Notice the last four words. Why do they matter?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Through Jesus Christ": the common priesthood is not a million private priesthoods running on their own steam; it is participation in HIS. Every offering of the baptized rises through the one Priest and his one sacrifice, or it does not rise. This protects tonight from both errors at once: no clericalism (the people really offer) and no self-made religion (the offering rises through him alone).

Build II: What Do Priests Like Us Offer?

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "If we are priests, we need an offering. Paul names it in one verse near the end of Romans, chapter 12, right at the top. Find what he tells baptized people to present, and as what."

Q3. What is the offering in Romans 12:1? And add Hebrews 13:15 to 16 to the inventory: what else do the baptized offer?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Present your BODIES as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship": the whole embodied life, laid on the altar while still living it. Hebrews adds "a sacrifice of praise... the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name," and doing good and sharing what you have, "for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." The Church completes the inventory without blushing (CCC 901, speaking of the lay faithful): your work, your prayers, your family life, your daily labor, your hardships patiently borne, offered through Christ, especially united to his offering in the Eucharist. Now make it concrete around the room: the spreadsheet finished with integrity is a priestly act. The 3 a.m. feeding. The chronic pain carried without cursing God. The apology made first. Priests need altars; yours is your week.

DIG DEEPER

Revelation 1:5 to 6: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father." John, in exile, opens the Bible's last book by singing your study's title over the persecuted churches. Where this study will end, in Session 12, is inside that sentence. For tonight, just read it and let it shine.

Build III: The Reformation's Verse

STEELMAN: BUILD IT UP. Give it full historic weight: "This is not a dorm-room objection; it moved a continent. The Reformers read 1 Peter 2:9 and said: there it is, in Peter's own hand: EVERY believer is a priest. So the medieval edifice, a separate priestly caste with powers the people lack, standing between the baptized and God, is precisely what this verse levels. The priesthood of all believers stands on Christ's finished sacrifice and sole mediation: with the one offering complete, no further sacrificing caste can stand between the baptized and God, and Rome's sacerdotal office does exactly that. And be honest: after seven weeks in this study, you have watched ordinary laypeople do real exegesis every session. Does that not feel like evidence for their side?"

Q4. Two discoveries answer this, and you already own both. First, from memory: when Exodus 19:6 was FIRST spoken, what did Israel's worship look like within months, at God's own command? And who once made a closely analogous appeal, and what happened?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Within the same Sinai narrative, at God's explicit command, Israel received an ordained priesthood: Aaron, vestments, ordination rites, the whole of Session 2 (commanded, note, in Exodus 28 to 29, even before the calf story). Corporate priestly vocation and ordained priestly office stood side by side at God's command; the verse being quoted never abolished ordained ministry, because it was never against it. And Korah made a closely analogous appeal: "all the congregation are holy, every one of them... why then do you exalt yourselves?" His premise was true, Exodus 19:6 said so, and the seizure was still rebellion; God answered with the earth, the fire, and then, gently, the budded staff. A holy, priestly people and a conferred priesthood within it were never contradictions in Israel. Quoting Israel's vocation verse cannot make them contradictions now.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Say: "Second discovery: stay inside 1 Peter itself. Read the letter's very first line, 1 Peter 1:1. Then flip to 1 Peter 5:1 to 4 and tell me who is being addressed, by whom, and told to do what."

Q5. What do you find at the two ends of the royal-priesthood letter? And so, how do the two priesthoods actually relate, in Peter's own practice and in the Church's teaching?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The letter opens "Peter, an APOSTLE of Jesus Christ," an officer writing with authority; and near its close: "So I exhort the ELDERS among you, as a fellow elder... Tend the flock of God that is your charge." The universal-priesthood letter is written by an officer, to churches that have officers, with orders for the officers, and Peter senses no contradiction. Be precise about what this proves: it shows that universal priesthood and real office coexist in the New Testament, no more; the specifically SACRAMENTAL shape of Catholic priesthood rests on the grounds built in Sessions 6, 7, and 10. One honest note about the verse itself: the "you" of 2:9 is corporate, a race, a nation, a people, a house of living stones; it crowns the Church as a priestly PEOPLE, just as Exodus 19:6 did, rather than issuing private clerical credentials to individuals.

So the Catholic teaching, far from confiscating the verse, states both halves at full strength: the common priesthood of all the baptized is REAL (CCC 1546; tonight's whole first hour), and the ministerial priesthood differs from it essentially, not as a higher caste in a spiritual aristocracy, but as a different kind of participation in Christ's one priesthood that exists AT THE SERVICE of the common priesthood (CCC 1547). The shepherds are for the flock; the ordained offer the Sacrifice so that the priestly people can offer their lives inside it. Your seven weeks of lay exegesis is not evidence against the Church's structure; it is the structure working: the ministry equipping the royal priesthood to open the word and offer their lives. And say the last thing plainly: if you were baptized, tonight's verse is about you. You are the kingdom of priests this study is named for.

Send

1. Name your altar out loud: what is the one place in your ordinary week (a job, a person, a suffering) that you will consciously offer as a priest this week?
2. "You are a chosen race": the identity is corporate; nobody is a priest alone. Who in your life needs to be told they are part of this people, and might only hear it from you?

Live It This Week

- Each morning this week, name one concrete thing from the coming day and offer it out loud as your priestly sacrifice: "Father, through Jesus Christ, I offer you this." Watch what it does to the thing.
- At Mass, at the preparation of the gifts, place your week on the paten in your mind: your work, your family, your hardest thing. This is CCC 901 as an act, not a paragraph.
- Memorize the memory verse with someone: it is long, it is worth it, and it is your name.

Memory Verse

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

1 Peter 2:9 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, at Sinai you spoke a vocation over a people, and in your Son you kept your word past every failure, ours included. Thank you for calling us out of darkness. Make our bodies living sacrifices, our praise a pleasing offering, and our whole week an altar, through Jesus Christ, our great High Priest. Amen.

Leader Reference Card: Session 8

Every passage used tonight, in order:

- 1 Peter 2:4 to 10 (Build I, read aloud; memory verse source at 2:9)
- Exodus 19:5 to 6 (Build I, recognition from memory)
- Romans 12:1 (Build II, live discovery)
- Hebrews 13:15 to 16 (Build II, read aloud)
- Revelation 1:5 to 6 (Dig Deeper)
- Numbers 16 (Build III, recalled from Session 4)
- 1 Peter 1:1 (Build III, live discovery)
- 1 Peter 5:1 to 4 (Build III, live discovery)
- Exodus 4:22 (leader reference, Thread C)