

A LIVING HOPE

A Catholic Journey Through the Letters of Saint Peter

Session One

Born Anew to a Living Hope

1 Peter 1:1-12

“By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”

1 Peter 1:3 (RSV2CE)

Saint Joseph Parish, Springfield, Nebraska

Leader Preparation Guide

For the facilitator only. Not for distribution.

Session Overview

Peter opens his first letter with one long, breathless sentence of praise (1:3-12 is nearly a single sentence in Greek), and everything the letter will say about suffering, holiness, and mission grows out of it. His readers are *exiles*: scattered believers in Asia Minor who no longer fit in the culture around them. Before Peter asks a single thing of them, he tells them who they are: chosen by the Father, sanctified by the Spirit, sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, and born anew to a living hope. Identity comes before obligation. Tonight the group discovers that order for themselves.

The Discovery Aim. By the end, participants should be able to say in their own words: our hope is alive because Christ is alive; trials do not contradict that hope but refine it the way fire refines gold; and the phrase “born anew” raises a question the passage does not yet answer: when and how does this new birth happen? We deliberately leave that question open. Peter himself will close it in chapter 3, and we will be there in Session Six.

The Catholic Touchstone. New birth is God's initiative and gift, not our achievement; hope is a theological virtue anchored in the Resurrection, not optimism about circumstances; and suffering, joined to Christ, becomes purifying rather than meaningless.

What You Need to Know

The Author and His Scars

This letter is written by the man who denied Jesus three times beside a charcoal fire. Every line about tested faith, sincere love, and hope in weakness comes from an apostle who failed publicly and was restored personally (John 21). Keep that in your pocket all study long: when Peter writes about “the genuineness of your faith” being tested (1:7), he is not theorizing. He writes with Silvanus's help (5:12) from “Babylon” (5:13), the early Church's code name for Rome, most likely in the early 60s, within a few years of his own martyrdom under Nero.

The Audience: Exiles of the Dispersion

Peter addresses “exiles of the Dispersion” across five Roman provinces of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). *Diaspora* was the Jewish word for God's people scattered among the nations after the exile. Yet the letter's audience is largely Gentile converts: Peter says they were ransomed “from the futile ways inherited from your fathers” (1:18) and once were “no people” (2:10). His move is deliberate and stunning: he takes Israel's exile vocabulary and hands it to baptized pagans. The Church is the new Israel scattered in the world, at home nowhere and on mission everywhere. Their “various trials” (1:6) appear to be not yet imperial persecution but the social suffering of converts, including slander, exclusion, and broken relationships (4:4), which makes the letter feel remarkably current to young adults.

The Trinitarian Doorway (1:2)

Verse 2 is one of the New Testament's most compact Trinitarian texts: chosen “by God the Father,” sanctified “by the Spirit,” for obedience to “Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.” That last phrase is the session's inductive treasure. It points back to Exodus 24, where Moses ratifies the covenant by throwing sacrificial blood on the people. Peter is saying: to be sprinkled with Christ's blood is to be brought inside the new covenant, sealed in sacrifice. Catholic readers have always heard the baptismal life here, and Peter himself will sound the baptismal note openly in 3:21. Let the group find Exodus 24 themselves in Q3 before you explain it.

Born Anew (1:3)

The Greek verb is *anagennaō*, “to beget again,” used in the New Testament only by Peter (1:3 and 1:23). In the Greek, God is the active subject: the Father is the one who has begotten us anew (the aorist active participle *anagennēsas*). We do not birth ourselves; the English rendering “we have been born anew” rightly puts us on the receiving end. The motive is “his great mercy” and the instrument is “the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” This is the letter's first baptismal note, and many commentators have observed that 1 Peter reads like baptismal catechesis from start to finish. Do not resolve the how-and-when question tonight. Session Six (3:21, “Baptism... now saves you... through the

resurrection of Jesus Christ”) closes the loop with Peter's own words, and the discovery lands far harder if the group has carried the question for five weeks.

Tested by Fire (1:6-7)

The word for “genuineness” is *dokimion*, the assayer's term for metal proven in the furnace. The image stands squarely in Israel's wisdom tradition (Wisdom 3, Sirach 2, Proverbs 17:3). Fire does not create gold; it reveals and purifies it. Trials do not create faith; they reveal and purify it. This is also the letter's first answer to the problem of suffering, a theme Peter will deepen in Sessions Four and Seven.

Prophets and Angels (1:10-12)

Peter closes the doorway with a jaw-dropping claim: the prophets who foretold Christ's sufferings and glory were serving *you*, and even angels “long to look” into what has now been announced to you. The verb suggests bending over to peer in, the same posture as the disciples stooping to look into the empty tomb. The point for your group: you are not on the margins of salvation history. You live in the chapter the prophets strained to see.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Have these passages marked in your Bible before the session. The Exodus text is the inductive discovery in Q3; the others are leader background and Dig Deeper material.

Exodus 24:3-8: The Blood of the Covenant

Moses ratifies the Sinai covenant by throwing sacrificial blood on the people: “Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you” (Ex 24:8). To be “sprinkled” is to be brought inside a covenant. Peter's greeting tells scattered nobodies that they stand where Israel stood at Sinai, ratified now in the blood of Christ, the language Jesus himself used at the Last Supper (“this is my blood of the covenant,” Mt 26:28).

Wisdom 3:5-6 and Sirach 2:1-6: Gold in the Furnace

“Like gold in the furnace he tried them” (Wis 3:6). “My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation... For gold is tested in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation” (Sir 2:1, 5). Peter's fire imagery in 1:7 is drawn from these deuterocanonical wisdom texts, a quiet apologetics note: the first pope's imagery comes from books the Catholic canon receives as Scripture, which most Protestant traditions later set apart as Apocrypha and eventually dropped from their Bibles. Use it gently in the Dig Deeper if the moment is right.

Psalms 39:12: The Sojourner

“For I am your passing guest, a sojourner, like all my fathers.” Israel's prayer book already knew that God's people are travelers, not settlers. Peter's “exiles” (1:1) and “aliens and exiles” (2:11) stand in this stream, which reaches back to Abraham, who confessed himself “a stranger and a sojourner” in the land of promise (Gen 23:4).

Voices of the Church

Three witnesses for your preparation. Share at most one with the group, and only after the related discussion has done its work.

Voices of the Church

St. Polycarp of Smyrna (d. c. 155), Letter to the Philippians 1

Writing within living memory of the apostles, St. Polycarp, himself a disciple of St. John, echoes 1 Peter 1:8 almost word for word: though you have not seen him, you believe in him with joy inexpressible and filled with glory. The earliest generations were already treasuring and echoing this letter. When your group reads 1:8 aloud, they join a chain of readers stretching to the apostolic age.

Voices of the Church

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), The City of God, Book I, Chapter 8

Answering pagans who mocked Christians suffering in the sack of Rome, St. Augustine observes that one and the same fire makes gold gleam and makes chaff smoke; the same affliction that proves and purifies the good ruins the wicked. The difference is not in the fire but in the material. This is 1 Peter 1:7 turned into a principle: trials reveal what a soul is made of.

Voices of the Church

St. Bede the Venerable (673-735), Commentary on the Catholic Epistles, on 1 Peter 1

The great monastic commentator on this letter reads “born anew” as the grace of baptism: the mercy of God regenerates us as his children through the sacrament of faith, so that our hope rests not on anything we have done but on the risen Christ into whom we have been reborn. St. Bede’s instinct is the Church’s instinct, and it is where Peter himself will land in 3:21.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1265-1266. Baptism makes the neophyte “a new creature,” an adopted son of God, a partaker of the divine nature, member of Christ, and temple of the Holy Spirit. This is the doctrinal home of “born anew.”

CCC 1817-1821. Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life, “placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength.” Peter’s “living hope” is this virtue, not a mood.

CCC 164. Faith is often “lived in darkness” and “put to the test”; the world’s evil and suffering can shake it. The Catechism and 1 Peter 1:6-7 give the same pastoral counsel: tested faith is normal faith.

Thread Watch

Threads planted tonight that later sessions will harvest. Do not resolve them early.

- 1. Born anew (1:3).** How and when does new birth happen? Held open until Session Six, where 3:21 names baptism.
- 2. Tested by fire (1:6-7).** Suffering as refining. Deepens at 2:21 (Session Four) and climaxes in the “fiery ordeal” of 4:12 (Session Seven).
- 3. The exile identity (1:1).** Resident aliens on mission. Becomes the engine of witness in 2:11-12 (Session Four) and of patience for the Lord’s return in 2 Peter 3 (Session Twelve).
- 4. Peter’s own story.** The restored denier writes every word. Surfaces explicitly when he calls himself “a fellow elder” and “a witness of the sufferings of Christ” in 5:1 (Session Eight).

Session Goals for the Leader

1. Establish the study’s method: the group works each question from the text before you confirm with the Answer block.
2. Help participants discover the Exodus 24 background of “sprinkling with his blood” for themselves.
3. Distinguish living hope (anchored in the Resurrection) from optimism (anchored in circumstances).
4. Plant the “born anew” question clearly and leave it honestly unresolved until Session Six.

Leader Note

Time frame: 75 to 90 minutes. Win 10-15, Build 50-60, Send 10-15. If time runs short, Q7 and the second Dig Deeper are the cuts; never cut the Exodus 24 discovery in Q3.

Discussion Guide

Session One • Born Anew to a Living Hope • 1 Peter 1:1-12

Opening Prayer

Opening Prayer

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who by his great mercy has given us new birth and a living hope. Open the Scriptures to us tonight as you opened them to your apostle Peter. Give us honest questions, patient ears, and hearts ready to be changed. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Gathering In

Leader Note

Fully open questions. No answer blocks, on purpose. Let everyone speak once before moving on.

- ◆ Have you ever been somewhere you clearly didn't belong: the wrong dress code, the wrong crowd, the outsider in the room? What did it feel like, and what did you do about it?
- ◆ When people say "I hope so," they usually mean "I'm not sure." What would it take for hope to be something you could actually stand on?

Build: Working the Text

Leader Note

Ask each question, then wait. Ten seconds of silence is the method working, not failing. Let two or three people answer from the text before you say anything, then use the Answer block to confirm and sharpen what the group has found, naming what they said where you can.

Movement One: Chosen Exiles (1:1-2)

Read: 1 Peter 1:1-2 *(from participants' own Bibles)*

- Q1.** Peter calls his readers "exiles of the Dispersion." Circle every word in verses 1 and 2 that describes what God has done for these exiles. What is the ratio of their status in the world to their status before God?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The world's verdict takes half a line: exiles, scattered. God's verdict takes the rest: chosen and destined by the Father, sanctified by the Spirit, set apart for obedience to Jesus Christ, sprinkled with his blood, addressed with grace and peace. Peter leads with identity before he asks for anything. Notice too that Father, Spirit, and Son all act in a single sentence: the whole Trinity is invested in these nobodies.

- Q2.** These believers were mostly converts from paganism (see 1:18 and 4:3), yet Peter greets them with Israel's vocabulary: chosen, dispersion, sprinkled. What is he claiming about who they are now?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He is grafting them into Israel's story. Words that once belonged to the Jewish exile now belong to baptized Gentiles in Turkey. The Church does not replace Israel's story; she inherits and continues it, scattered among the nations as God's own people. That means the Old Testament is now their family history, which is exactly why this study will keep sending us back to it.

- Q3.** The strangest phrase in the greeting is “sprinkling with his blood.” Turn to Exodus 24:3-8 and read it aloud. What is happening in that scene, and what is Peter therefore saying happened to you?

Leader Note

This is the session's discovery moment. Give it time. If the group stalls, ask: who gets sprinkled in Exodus 24, and what do the people say just before the blood is thrown?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

At Sinai, Moses throws the blood of the covenant sacrifice on the people after they pledge obedience: “Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you” (Ex 24:8). Sprinkled blood means covenant membership, sealed in sacrifice. Peter is saying: what Israel received at Sinai, you received in Christ, whose own words at the Last Supper (“this is my blood of the covenant,” Mt 26:28) make him the sacrifice that seals it. You are not fans of Jesus; you are covenant members in his blood.

Movement Two: Born Anew to a Living Hope (1:3-9)

Read: 1 Peter 1:3-9 (from participants' own Bibles)

- Q4.** Verse 3 says we “have been born anew.” Look at the grammar closely: who does the action, what motivates it, and what is it accomplished through? What is conspicuously missing from the sentence?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

God does the action (in the English the verb is passive: we are born, we do not birth ourselves; in the Greek the Father is the active subject who begets us anew). His “great mercy” motivates it. It comes “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Missing entirely: anything we did. No one contributes to his own birth. New birth is sheer gift, which Catholics affirm without reserve: grace is first (CCC 1996-1999).

- Q5.** Peter says our hope is “living” and our inheritance is “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1:4). Name the things people around us actually build their hope on. Which of those survive Peter's three adjectives?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Careers perish, reputations can be defiled, relationships and health can fade. Peter chose three

adjectives that eliminate every earthly candidate one by one. A living hope is one whose anchor is already alive on the other side of death: the risen Christ. It is not optimism about circumstances; it is certainty about a person. That is why the Catechism calls hope a virtue that relies “not on our own strength” but on Christ's promises (CCC 1817).

Q6. Verses 6 and 7 compare tested faith to gold tested by fire. Work the image: what does fire actually do to gold, and what does it do to everything mixed in with the gold? So what is a trial for?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Fire does not create gold and cannot destroy it; it reveals it and burns away the dross. Peter's word for “genuineness” (dokimion) is the assayer's term for metal proven in the furnace. Trials do not manufacture faith and need not destroy it; rightly endured, they show faith to be real and purify what is mixed into it. Suffering is not the contradiction of the living hope. It is the furnace where the hope is proven genuine.

Dig Deeper

Peter's furnace image echoes Israel's wisdom books: “like gold in the furnace he tried them” (Wisdom 3:6) and “gold is tested in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation” (Sirach 2:5). Both are deuterocanonical books, received in the Catholic Old Testament since the early Church. The first pope's imagery is soaked in Scripture that some later traditions set aside. Read Wisdom 3:1-6 this week and hear how much of 1 Peter is already in it.

Q7. Verse 8: “Without having seen him you love him.” Peter saw Jesus daily for three years; his readers never did, and neither have we. What does Peter's sentence assume is possible for people like us, and how does verse 9 say it ends?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Real love and real joy in a Christ we have not seen with our eyes: not secondhand faith, but firsthand relationship through faith. Jesus made the same promise to Thomas: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20:29), a beatitude spoken over every generation after the apostles, including this room. And verse 9 names the destination: “the salvation of your souls,” received as the outcome of a faith that keeps believing, loving, and rejoicing.

Building the Question: When Are We Born Anew?

Leader Note

This is a build-then-press chain in the study's steelman style. Let the group construct the strongest form of the common evangelical reading before testing it against Peter's own letter. Keep the tone warm; many of us have friends and family who hold this view sincerely.

Q8. Many sincere Christians read “born anew” as the moment a person prays to accept Jesus: new birth happens at the instant of personal faith, and baptism follows later as a public symbol. Build that case as strongly as you can from this passage. What in 1:3-9 supports it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A strong case can be made: the passage is thick with personal faith (“through faith,” 1:5; “you believe in him,” 1:8; “the outcome of your faith,” 1:9), and baptism is not mentioned once in these verses. If chapter 1 were all we had, the faith-moment reading would be reasonable. Say so honestly; steel, not straw.

Q9. Now press it. Verse 3 says we are born anew “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Hold that phrase in your memory. If Peter, later in this same letter, names a concrete thing that saves us “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” what would that do to the question?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It would mean Peter himself connects the new birth of 1:3 to that concrete thing, since he deliberately reuses the exact phrase. Tonight we only plant the question. Do not look it up yet; carry it. When we reach chapter 3 in Session Six, Peter will answer in his own words, and the answer is one of the most startling verses in the New Testament. For now, notice only this: the question of how God applies the Resurrection to us is one Scripture answers, not one it leaves to feelings.

Movement Three: What Prophets and Angels Longed For (1:10-12)

Read: 1 Peter 1:10-12 *(from participants' own Bibles)*

Q10. According to verses 10-12, whom were the prophets serving when they prophesied about the sufferings and glory of Christ? And what are the angels doing? What does that make of the position you occupy in salvation history?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

“They were serving not themselves but you” (1:12): Isaiah and the prophets were, without fully knowing it, writing for the people who would live after the Messiah came, which includes everyone in this room. And angels “long to look” into these things, bending over to peer in like the disciples stooping at the empty tomb. You are not in the cheap seats of God's story. You live in the chapter the prophets strained to see and the angels still marvel at. Exiles in the world's eyes; the wonder of angels in heaven's.

Send: Carrying It Out

Leader Note

Fully open. No answer blocks. Let the text do the sending.

- ◆ Peter gave his readers their identity before he gave them a single command. Where in your life this week do you most need to act from “chosen and destined” rather than from “exile and outsider”?
- ◆ Name one trial you are in right now, small or large. What would it look like to treat it this week as furnace rather than accident?

Live It This Week

This week: (1) Memorize 1 Peter 1:3. (2) Read Wisdom 3:1-6 slowly once, and notice Peter’s furnace. (3) Carry the planted question, “when are we born anew?”, without looking ahead; write down your own best guess and bring it to Session Six. (4) Once this week, when you feel like the outsider, pray one sentence: “Father, I am chosen, sanctified, and sprinkled; let me act like it.”

Closing Prayer

Father of mercies, you chose us before we chose you, sanctified us by your Spirit, and sealed us in the blood of your Son. Make our hope a living hope. When the fire comes, let it find gold. And keep us restless for the day when the faith we now hold without seeing becomes sight. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3,

RSV2CE)

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in this session

Primary text

1 Peter 1:1-12 (read in three movements: 1-2, 3-9, 10-12)

Discovery passage (read aloud in session)

Exodus 24:3-8 (blood of the covenant; the key to “sprinkling with his blood”)

Leader background and Dig Deeper

Wisdom 3:1-6; Sirach 2:1-6; Proverbs 17:3 (gold in the furnace)

Psalm 39:12; Genesis 23:4 (the sojourner tradition)

Matthew 26:28 (blood of the covenant at the Last Supper)

John 20:29 (blessed are those who have not seen); John 21 (Peter restored)

1 Peter 1:18; 2:10-12; 4:3-4; 5:1, 12-13 (audience and author context)

Threads planted (do not resolve early)

“Born anew” held open until 1 Peter 3:21 (Session Six)

Fire and suffering deepens at 2:21 (Session Four) and 4:12 (Session Seven)

Catechism

CCC 164; 1265-1266; 1817-1821; 1996-1999