

A LIVING HOPE

A Catholic Journey Through the Letters of Saint Peter

Session Eight

Shepherd the Flock

1 Peter 5:1-14

“Tend the flock of God that is your charge... And when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory”

1 Peter 5:2, 4 (RSV2CE)

Saint Joseph Parish, Springfield, Nebraska

Leader Preparation Guide

For the facilitator only. Not for distribution.

Session Overview

The first letter closes with Peter's most personal page. He addresses the elders “as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ,” hands on the very commission Jesus gave him on the beach (“Tend the flock”; “Feed my sheep,” Jn 21), reaches for a Greek word that pictures tying on an apron just where memory would supply Jesus with the towel (5:5; Jn 13), warns of the devil as a prowling lion, and signs off from “Babylon”, Rome, with Mark at his side. Tonight resolves two threads: the ministerial priesthood promised in Session Three, and Peter's own arc from courtyard denier to shepherd who will strengthen his brethren all the way to the martyrdom that ancient tradition remembers as a cross of his own.

The Discovery Aim. Participants should be able to say: ordered pastoral office exists inside the priestly people, and its style is service, not domination; Peter's exhortation is his own restoration passed on; humility is the community's uniform and anxiety's antidote is a transfer of custody; and the devil is real, prowling, and resistible.

The Catholic Touchstone. The ministerial priesthood as service within, not above, the common priesthood (CCC 1547, 1551); Petrine ministry exercised as Christ designed it, authority in the form of a towel; Peter's presence and martyrdom in Rome as the root of the papacy's address; and the sober realism of spiritual combat.

What You Need to Know

Fellow Elder, Witness, Partaker (5:1)

Peter's three self-titles are a masterclass. "Fellow elder" (*sympresbyteros*) stands alongside those he exhorts; "witness of the sufferings of Christ" speaks from firsthand memory of that night: the agony, the arrest, the courtyard; "partaker in the glory to be revealed" looks forward to his own share. The humility is real, and it is not a denial of office: the letter opened "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1), and this same man received the keys (Mt 16:19) and the threefold commission (Jn 21). The steelman chain in Q7-Q8 handles the relationship between the humble style and the real office.

Tend the Flock (5:2-4): A Commission Handed On

"Tend (*poimane*) the flock of God that is your charge." On the beach in John 21:15-17, the risen Jesus asked Peter three times "do you love me?", once for each denial, and commanded: "Feed my lambs... Tend (*poimaine*) my sheep... Feed my sheep." Tonight's first discovery (Q2) lets the group find that scene behind this verse: Peter is handing on his own restoration. The three corruptions and their cures are perennial: not by constraint but willingly; not for shameful gain but eagerly; not as domineering over "your charge" (literally the *klēroi*, the portions allotted, from which English gets "clergy") but as examples. And the flock is "of God", never the shepherd's property. Over all stands "the chief Shepherd" (*archipoimēn*, 5:4): every pastor is under-shepherd to Christ, fulfilling Ezekiel 34's promise that God himself would shepherd his flock and judge the shepherds who fed themselves.

The Apron (5:5-7)

"Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another." The verb *egkombōsasthe* evokes tying on a slave's apron, and it is nearly impossible that the man writing it was not remembering the night Jesus "girded himself with a towel" and washed his feet over his protest (Jn 13:4-8): tonight's second discovery (Q4). The supporting quote is Proverbs 3:34 ("God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble"), and the pastoral jewel follows: "Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you" (5:7, echoing Ps 55:22). Note the logic: casting anxiety is filed under humility, because worry is often pride's insistence on carrying what was never ours to carry.

The Lion and the Brotherhood (5:8-11)

"Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith." Peter, whom Satan asked to sift like wheat (Lk 22:31), takes the enemy seriously without panic: sobriety, vigilance, resistance, and solidarity ("the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world"). The benediction of 5:10 gathers the whole letter: after suffering "a little while" (1:6 again), the God of all grace will himself "restore, establish, and strengthen you." Jesus had told Peter: "when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:32). This letter is that sentence obeyed.

She Who Is at Babylon (5:12-14)

“She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark.” “She” is the Church; “Babylon” is the early Christian cipher for Rome (cf. Rev 17-18): the power that, like old Babylon, dominated the world and would destroy the Temple. So the letter is sent from Rome, with Mark at Peter's side, the same John Mark whom the earliest tradition (St. Papias, within living memory) names as Peter's interpreter, whose Gospel preserves Peter's preaching. Silvanus (Silas) carried and likely helped draft the letter (5:12). Peter's presence and martyrdom in Rome under Nero rests on a remarkably early and convergent chain of witnesses: 1 Clement 5 within one generation, then St. Ignatius of Antioch, Dionysius of Corinth, St. Irenaeus, and the Roman priest Gaius, who could point to the apostle's monument on the Vatican hill. That convergence is why Rome, not Jerusalem or Antioch, became the see of Peter's successors.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Ezekiel 34: Shepherds Judged, God Shepherds

The prophetic indictment behind 5:2-4: Israel's shepherds fed themselves, ruled with force, abandoned the scattered; therefore God promises: “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep” and “I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David.” Christ the chief Shepherd fulfills both promises at once, and every under-shepherd is measured against Ezekiel's charges: Peter's three corrections (constraint, gain, domineering) map onto them.

Proverbs 3:34 and Psalm 55:22

“Toward the scornful he is scornful, but to the humble he shows favor” (Prov 3:34, quoted at 5:5, as also in Jas 4:6). “Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you” (Ps 55:22, echoed at 5:7). Peter's counsel is the Old Testament's wisdom, proven under Nero.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church

St. Clement of Rome (d. c. 99), Letter to the Corinthians 5

Writing from Rome within about three decades of the events, St. Clement holds up “the good apostles”: Peter, who through unrighteous jealousy endured not one or two but many labors, and having thus borne witness went to his appointed place of glory; and Paul likewise. It is the earliest surviving text read, from the beginning, as attesting Peter's martyrdom; it was written from the very city, by the man remembered as his successor, while eyewitnesses still lived.

Voices of the Church

St. Papias of Hierapolis (c. 60-130), as preserved by Eusebius, Church History III.39

Papias, who made it his business to collect the words of the apostles' disciples, records the tradition of

John the Elder: Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, what he remembered of the things said and done by the Lord, taking care to omit nothing he had heard and to falsify nothing. On this earliest testimony, the Gospel of Mark preserves Peter's preaching in ink; later tradition (St. Irenaeus, St. Clement of Alexandria) adds that Mark wrote it in Rome, and the "my son Mark" of 5:13 fits that picture exactly.

Voices of the Church

St. Gregory the Great (d. 604), Pastoral Rule, Book II

The pope who styled himself "servant of the servants of God" teaches that the ruler of souls must be first in service: pure in thought, exemplary in conduct, discreet in silence and profitable in speech, a near neighbor to everyone in compassion and exalted above all in contemplation, never preferring to rule over men rather than to serve them. Book II of the Pastoral Rule is 1 Peter 5:2-3 expanded into the West's manual for shepherds, written by a successor of the fisherman.

Catechism Connection

CCC 880-882. Christ made St. Peter the rock of his Church and gave him the keys; the pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, is the perpetual and visible source of unity. Why Rome? Because of 5:13: Peter shepherded, wrote, and died there.

CCC 1547 and 1551. The ministerial priesthood differs essentially from the common priesthood and is at its service; it is a true office, and it is "completely oriented" to service of Christ and the faithful. Authority in the Church wears an apron: 5:2-5 is the proof text.

CCC 409 and 2851-2854. The Christian life is combat against the powers of darkness; the Our Father's final petition asks deliverance from the Evil One, a personal adversary, not an abstraction. Peter's lion is the Catechism's realism.

Thread Watch

1. RESOLVED: Two priesthoods. Session Three promised the ordered ministry inside the priestly people; 5:1-4 delivers it: elders with a real charge, styled as service. Name the resolution aloud after Q8.

2. RESOLVED: Peter's arc. Courtyard (2:23, Session Four) to beach (Jn 21, tonight) to "strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:32) fulfilled in this letter, to Babylon and the cross. The letter itself is the restored man's obedience.

3. Suffering "a little while." 5:10 reprises 1:6 and closes the first letter's frame. Second Peter opens a new movement next session: participation in the divine nature.

Session Goals for the Leader

-
1. Let the group discover John 21 behind 5:2 and John 13 behind 5:5: Peter's memories become his ministry.
 2. Run the fellow-elder steelman honestly and resolve the two-priesthoods thread.
 3. Teach 5:7 as humility's twin: anxiety surrendered to the One who cares.
 4. Ground Peter-in-Rome historically (Babylon, Mark, 1 Clement) without polemics.

Leader Note

Time frame: 75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, Q6 and the Dig Deeper are the cuts; never cut Q2, Q4, or the steelman chain. Ask participants to bring next week both letters read: 2 Peter begins Session Nine.

Discussion Guide

Session Eight • Shepherd the Flock • 1 Peter 5:1-14

Opening Prayer

Opening Prayer

Chief Shepherd of the flock, you sought us when we strayed and set shepherds over us in your name. Clothe everyone here with humility, take from us the anxieties we were never meant to carry, and make us sober and watchful against the enemy of our souls. Amen.

Win: Gathering In

-
- ◆ Describe the best leader you have ever been under, coach, boss, teacher, priest. What made their authority easy to follow?
 - ◆ What is one anxiety you have been carrying this month that you would hand off tonight if you actually believed someone competent would take it?

Build: Working the Text

Leader Note

One-minute recap: the fiery ordeal is participation, not abandonment, and judgment begins at God's house. Tonight the first letter closes with Peter's most personal page. Ask, wait, work, confirm.

Movement One: The Beach Behind the Verse (5:1-4)

Read: 1 Peter 5:1-4 (from participants' own Bibles)

- Q1.** Verse 1: Peter could have written “I, the chief of the apostles, command the elders.” Instead he chooses three titles: “fellow elder,” “witness of the sufferings of Christ,” “partaker in the glory to be revealed.” Weigh each. What does each title claim, and what does the whole self-introduction refuse to do?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

“Fellow elder” stands beside those he exhorts rather than above them; “witness of the sufferings” speaks from firsthand memory; he was there for the agony, the arrest, and the courtyard; “partaker in the glory” confesses that he too is still waiting for the crown. The introduction refuses self-exaltation without renouncing responsibility: the letter still opened “Peter, an apostle” (1:1), and he is still the one writing the instructions. Authority is real; the register is brotherly. Hold that combination; Q7 will test it.

- Q2.** Verse 2 commands the elders: “Tend the flock of God.” Peter did not invent that sentence. Turn to John 21:15-17 and read it aloud. Where did Peter hear it first, how many times, and what had he done three times shortly before? What is he doing with his own worst memory tonight?

Leader Note

Discovery moment one. If they stall: count the questions on the beach, count the denials in the courtyard, and notice which verb Jesus uses in the middle command.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

On the beach after the Resurrection, the risen Jesus asked “do you love me?” three times, once for each denial by the fire, and commanded: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. The middle verb (poimaine, tend/shepherd) is the very verb Peter now writes. He is handing on his own restoration: the commission that rebuilt him becomes the charge he gives every shepherd after him. No one in the Church leads from a spotless record; the first shepherd led from a forgiven one.

- Q3.** Verses 2-3 name three corruptions of shepherding with three corrections: “not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples.” Turn each pair on leadership you have seen (in the Church or anywhere). Which corruption does the most damage, and why is “being examples” the strongest form of authority?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The three perennial corrupters are reluctance (the shepherd who checked out), greed (the shepherd on the take), and domination (the shepherd who confuses the flock with property, though it is “the flock of God” and the charge is allotted, not owned). Domineering usually wounds deepest because it weaponizes holy things. Example is the strongest authority because it is the only kind that works when no one is compelled: sheep follow a shepherd they trust walking ahead of them. Verse 4 keeps every under-shepherd honest: the chief Shepherd is coming, and he audits (Ezek 34).

Movement Two: The Towel and the Transfer (5:5-7)

Read: 1 Peter 5:5-7 (from participants' own Bibles)

- Q4.** Verse 5: “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another.” The Greek verb paints someone tying on a slave’s apron. Turn to John 13:4-8 and read it. What did Peter watch Jesus tie on, what was done to Peter over his own protest, and why would this word be the one Peter reaches for?

Leader Note

Discovery moment two. Let the image land before confirming: the old fisherman choosing a knot-the-apron word, near the end of his life, remembering his feet in the Lord’s hands.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Jesus “girded himself with a towel” and washed the disciples’ feet, and Peter protested (“You shall never wash my feet”) and was overruled: “If I do not wash you, you have no part in me.” When Peter tells the whole community to knot humility on like an apron, it is natural, and hard to resist, to hear the towel in the upper room behind the word: Peter had watched God dress as a slave. Humility is not a mood in this letter; it is the family uniform, and God enforces the dress code: “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Prov 3:34).

- Q5.** Verse 7 is one of Scripture’s most loved sentences: “Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you.” But look where Peter filed it: inside the paragraph on humility (“Humble yourselves... casting...”). Why is worry a humility issue? What is anxious self-reliance quietly claiming?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Chronic anxiety often carries a hidden claim: this outcome depends on me, and no one, including God, can be trusted with it. Casting anxieties is therefore an act of humility: a transfer of custody to the One actually competent to hold them (“cast your burden on the LORD,” Ps 55:22). “He cares about you” is the ground: not a technique but a relationship. Note the verb is decisive, not passive: you throw the weight over; worry retrieved nightly was never really cast.

Leader Note: Say plainly that clinical anxiety, depression, and trauma are not sins of pride and are not cured by willpower. Casting our cares on God works alongside good counseling and medical care, not instead of them; helping a struggling participant find that care is itself an act of shepherding.

Movement Three: The Lion, the Grace, and Babylon (5:8-14)

Read: 1 Peter 5:8-14 *(from participants' own Bibles)*

Q6. Verses 8-9: “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour.

Resist him, firm in your faith.” Peter has personal history here (Jesus once told him: “Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat,” Lk 22:31). What do sobriety, watchfulness, and resistance look like practically, and what two errors about the devil does this verse forbid?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The two forbidden errors are dismissal (no adversary exists; the lion loves being doubted) and panic (the lion is unbeatable; but he is resistible: “resist him, firm in your faith,” and “your brotherhood throughout the world” stands with you). Practically: sobriety means keeping your judgment unclouded, by substances, media, or exhaustion; watchfulness means knowing your own weak gates; resistance means firm faith, quick confession, the sacraments, and never fighting alone. A prowling predator picks off the isolated: the straggler from the flock is the meal (which is one more reason the flock has shepherds).

Q7. Now a challenge you will meet: many Christians point to 5:1, “I exhort the elders as a fellow elder,”

and argue: Peter claims no special office; he is one presbyter among equals, so the papacy contradicts Peter himself. Build that case as strongly as you can from tonight's chapter. What genuinely supports it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A strong case: Peter self-identifies as *sympresbyteros*, fellow elder, not as supreme pontiff; he explicitly forbids domineering over the flock (5:3); he directs all eyes to Christ as the only “chief Shepherd” (5:4); and nowhere in either letter does he demand submission to himself. If these verses were the whole evidence, Petrine office would look like a later construction on top of a deliberately flat brotherhood. Press it harder still: the letter assumes ordinary plural eldership in each local church, with no single shepherd over shepherds in view; neither letter says a word about successors to Peter or a continuing universal jurisdiction; and even if Peter held a special apostolic role, one can grant that and still argue it was personal and unrepeatable, ending at his death. Say it that fairly; it is the honest reading of the verse in isolation.

Q8. Now press it with the rest of the evidence. How does this same letter open (1:1)? What did Jesus give

this man in Matthew 16:18-19, and what did he command him on the beach (Jn 21) and before the Passion (Lk 22:31-32)? And here is the sharper question: does exercising real office in a brotherly, non-domineering style argue against the office, or reveal how Christ designed it to work (Lk 22:25-27)?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The letter opens “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,” a real and authoritative office, exercised here over churches he did not found; the same man received the keys and the rock-naming (Mt 16:18-19), the command to strengthen his brethren (Lk 22:32), and the threefold charge over Christ's sheep (Jn 21).

“Fellow elder” is therefore not a denial of office but its Christ-taught style: “let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves” (Lk 22:26). Humble register plus real authority is not a contradiction; it is the specification. The papacy’s own traditional title, coined by St. Gregory the Great, says it exactly: servant of the servants of God. The Catechism teaches the substance: the pope as the perpetual and visible source of unity (CCC 880-882) and ordained ministry as wholly ordered to service (CCC 1551). Session Three’s promise is now paid: the priestly people (2:9) and the ordered shepherds within it (5:1-4), each real, each for the other. Concede honestly what this chapter alone cannot do: the case for a continuing Petrine office is cumulative, resting on Scripture read whole together with the Church’s earliest practice and Tradition, not on 1 Peter 5 by itself.

- Q9.** Verse 13: “She who is at Babylon... sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark.” Babylon had been rubble for centuries. What city is Peter naming in code, why that code name, and what two enormous consequences hang on this quiet verse (think: a Gospel, and an address)?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

“Babylon” is the early Christian cipher for Rome (as in Revelation 17-18): the world power that, like old Babylon, dominated God’s people. So Peter writes from Rome, with Mark beside him. Consequence one: the earliest tradition (St. Papias, within living memory) says Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote down his preaching, which is to say that, on this early testimony, the Gospel of Mark preserves Peter’s testimony in ink; when you read Mark, you are reading this letter’s author’s memories. Consequence two: Peter shepherded there and, as the earliest chain of witnesses attests (St. Clement of Rome within one generation, then St. Ignatius of Antioch, Dionysius of Corinth, and St. Irenaeus), died a martyr in that city, which is why the successor of Peter is the Bishop of Rome. The papacy’s mailing address is hiding in the letter’s return address.

Send: Carrying It Out

- ◆ Whose shepherd are you, formally or informally: siblings, friends, a small group, someday a family?
Which of the three corruptions (reluctance, gain, domination) is your temptation, and what would tending them “willingly and eagerly” change?
- ◆ Name the anxiety from the Win question. Are you willing, right now, to cast it, and not retrieve it at midnight? What retrieval habit will you have to break?

Live It This Week

This week: (1) Memorize 1 Peter 5:7. (2) Each night, name the day’s heaviest anxiety aloud and cast it with the words of Psalm 55:22; if you catch yourself retrieving it, cast it again without self-reproach. (3) Do one hidden act of apron-wearing service in your household. (4) Pray one Our Father for the pope and your bishop, under-shepherds accountable to the chief Shepherd. (5) Read 2 Peter 1 before next session:

the study's second movement begins.

Closing Prayer

God of all grace, who called us to your eternal glory in Christ: after we have suffered a little while, restore, establish, and strengthen us. Give your Church shepherds after your own heart, clothe us all in the apron of humility, and keep us firm against the prowling enemy. To you be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Scripture Memory

“Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you” (1 Peter 5:7, RSV2CE)

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in this session

Primary text

1 Peter 5:1-14 (movements: 1-4, 5-7, 8-14)

Discovery passages (read aloud in session)

John 21:15-17 (the beach behind 5:2); John 13:4-8 (the towel behind 5:5)

Leader background and Dig Deeper

Ezekiel 34 (shepherds judged; God shepherds); Proverbs 3:34 (quoted 5:5); Psalm 55:22 (behind 5:7)

Matthew 16:18-19 (keys); Luke 22:25-27, 31-32 (style of authority; sifting; strengthen); Revelation 17-18 (Babylon)

Acts 12:12; 15:37-39; Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11 (Mark's story, if asked)

Threads

RESOLVED: two priesthods (2:9 with 5:1-4); RESOLVED: Peter's arc (courtyard, beach, Babylon)

“A little while” (5:10) closes the frame of 1:6; 2 Peter opens Session Nine

Catechism

CCC 880-882; 1547; 1551; 409; 2851-2854