

A LIVING HOPE

A Catholic Journey Through the Letters of Saint Peter

Session Nine

Partakers of the Divine Nature

2 Peter 1:1-11

*“... he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may...
become partakers of the divine nature”*

2 Peter 1:4 (RSV2CE)

Saint Joseph Parish, Springfield, Nebraska

Leader Preparation Guide

For the facilitator only. Not for distribution.

Session Overview

The study's second movement opens with the boldest sentence Peter ever wrote: God's promises exist so that “you may become partakers of the divine nature” (1:4). Where the first letter armed exiles to endure the world, the second letter aims them at their destiny: real participation in God's own life, what the Church's theology calls *theosis* or divinization. From that summit Peter builds a ladder of virtues (1:5-8), warns against the nearsightedness that forgets baptism (1:9), and issues the letter's key command: “be the more zealous to confirm your call and election” (1:10), grace answered by effort, perseverance sought rather than presumed. This session sets the trajectory for the whole second letter: since this is your destiny, grow toward it.

The Discovery Aim. Participants should be able to say: my destiny is not merely to be pardoned but to share God's own life; the divine power has already supplied everything needed for godliness; virtues grow on each other in an ordered ladder that starts from faith and ends in love; and my election is confirmed by zealous cooperation, not presumed like a possession.

The Catholic Touchstone. Divinization, the patristic heart of salvation (CCC 460 is built on tonight's verse); grace as real participation in God's life (CCC 1997); merit and growth as grace cooperating with grace (CCC 2008-2010); and perseverance as a gift to be hoped for and asked for (CCC 2016, 2849), against both presumption and despair.

What You Need to Know

Introducing 2 Peter: An Honest Word

Be straightforward if asked. The letter presents itself as Peter's: "Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1), an eyewitness of the Transfiguration (1:16-18), author of a previous letter (3:1), near his death (1:14). In the early centuries its authenticity was the most discussed of the catholic epistles (Origen and Eusebius record the doubts honestly), and modern scholars debate whether it is Peter's own hand, the work of a disciple completing his testament (a recognized ancient practice), or later. What is not in doubt: the Church weighed those questions with eyes open and canonized the letter as inspired Scripture, apostolic testimony carrying Peter's authority. The genre is a testament: a dying leader's last deposit, which explains its urgency about remembrance (1:12-15). Teach it with full confidence as the word of God and Peter's testament; hedge only where the Church hedges.

Our God and Savior Jesus Christ (1:1)

"In the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ": in the Greek construction, one article governs both nouns, making this one of the New Testament's most direct ascriptions of the title "God" to Jesus (with Jn 1:1; 20:28; Titus 2:13; Heb 1:8). The fisherman who once blurted "you are the Christ" now writes the full confession without flinching. Note also "a faith of equal standing with ours": latecomers and eyewitnesses hold the same precious faith; no second-class Christians.

Partakers of the Divine Nature (1:3-4)

The order matters: "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (1:3, past tense: the equipment is already issued) "through the knowledge of him," and through his "precious and very great promises... that you may become partakers (*koinōnoi*) of the divine nature." This is not pantheism and not promotion to godhood by nature: the creature remains creature. It is adoption raised to its full voltage: by grace, God shares with us his own life, the communion of knowing and loving that the Trinity is, beginning at baptism and consummated in glory (1 Jn 3:2). The Fathers made this the very definition of salvation, and the Catechism plants its flag on this verse: the Word became flesh to make us partakers of the divine nature (CCC 460). If your group has only ever heard salvation described as acquittal, tonight enlarges the map: pardon is the porch; participation is the house.

The Ladder of Virtues (1:5-9)

"For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love." Eight rungs in a deliberate chain: faith is the foundation (the theological root), love (*agapē*) the crown; between them, a natural reading, the one Q5 will put under pressure, is that each virtue stabilizes the next: conviction needs moral courage (virtue), courage needs discernment (knowledge), discernment needs mastery of

appetite (self-control), mastery needs staying power (steadfastness), staying power needs Godward orientation (godliness), and reverence for God must become warmth toward the brethren before it can flower into universal love. “For this very reason... make every effort”: grace does not replace effort; it funds it (cf. Phil 2:12-13). Verse 9’s diagnosis of the stalled Christian is precise: “blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins”: spiritual myopia begins with baptismal amnesia, a direct callback to everything Session Six established.

Confirm Your Call and Election (1:10-11)

“Be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom.” Election is God’s initiative; confirming it is our cooperation; the grammar is conditional (“if you do this”) and the command would be nonsense if perseverance were automatic. This is the Catholic both/and in one verse: assurance is real (“you will never fall” stands at the end of the path of zeal) and presumption is excluded (the path must actually be walked). The steelman chain in Q7-Q8 engages the once-saved-always-saved reading with charity and lets the verse’s own grammar answer.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Genesis 1:26-27: The Image Restored and Surpassed

Humanity was created “in our image, after our likeness”: made for communion with God from the first page. Sin defaced the likeness; grace does more than repair it: in Christ, the image-bearers become partakers. What Adam grasped at (“you will be like God,” Gen 3:5, the serpent’s counterfeit of a true destiny) is given as gift on God’s terms.

Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34-36

“I say, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you’”: traditionally understood as spoken to Israel’s judges; Jesus himself identifies them simply as those to whom the word of God came (Jn 10:35). Interpreters debate the psalm’s original referents, but his argument does not depend on settling that question. Jesus himself quotes it (Jn 10:34-36) to argue from the lesser to the greater about his own divine sonship. Tonight’s discovery (Q3) walks the group through both texts: Scripture’s own language strains toward the destiny 2 Peter 1:4 names.

Voices of the Church

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St. Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373), On the Incarnation 54

The champion of Nicaea states the exchange in one immortal sentence: the Son of God became man so that we might become God, that is, sharers by grace in the divine life. The Catechism quotes him on exactly this point (CCC 460), and his logic guarded Christmas itself: only one who is truly God can give creatures a share in God.

Voices of the Church

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (d. c. 202), *Against Heresies*, Book V, Preface

A spiritual grandson of the apostles (his teacher St. Polycarp knew St. John), St. Irenaeus writes that the Word of God, through his transcendent love, became what we are, that he might bring us to be what he himself is. The wonderful exchange was the Church's teaching within a century of Peter's death, and the Catechism gathers a companion sentence of his, from *Against Heresies* III.19.1, beside Athanasius's under 2 Peter 1:4 (CCC 460).

Voices of the Church

St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), *Opusculum 57 on Corpus Christi*

The Angelic Doctor, in his office for Corpus Christi, teaches that the only-begotten Son of God, wishing to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods. That this line stands in a Eucharistic work is no accident: the sacrament of his Body is where the partaking of 1:4 touches our lips. It is the third voice the Catechism gathers under tonight's verse (CCC 460).

Catechism Connection

CCC 460. “The Word became flesh to make us partakers of the divine nature”: the paragraph opens by quoting 2 Peter 1:4 and then stacks St. Irenaeus, St. Athanasius, and St. Thomas beneath it. Tonight's three witnesses are the Catechism's own, though its Irenaeus quotation is a companion line from *Against Heresies* III.19.1.

CCC 1996-1997. Grace is favor, free and undeserved, and it is “a participation in the life of God,” introducing us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life. Grace is not a substance God gives instead of himself; it is his own life shared.

CCC 2008-2010, 2016, and 2849. Merit: God's free initiative first, then man's collaboration, so that our merits are themselves God's gifts; the faithful rightly hope for the grace of final perseverance (CCC 2016), and the Our Father's last petition asks for it (CCC 2849). Zeal to confirm one's call (1:10) is this doctrine in apostolic form.

Thread Watch

1. New thread: growth. “Make every effort... supplement” (1:5) opens the second letter's arc; its final verse will close it: “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord” (3:18, Session Twelve). The ladder is the study's second-half spine.

2. Baptismal memory. 1:9's “forgotten that he was cleansed” reaches back to 3:21 (Session Six): the diagnosis of stagnation is amnesia about the font.

3. Knowledge (epignōsis). “The knowledge of him” brackets this letter (1:2-3, 8; 3:18) and is the antidote it will prescribe against false teachers (Session Eleven). Plant the word tonight.

Session Goals for the Leader

1. Enlarge the group's picture of salvation from acquittal to participation, with CCC 460's three voices.
2. Walk the ladder rung by rung and have each participant locate their current rung honestly.
3. Run the eternal-security steelman with charity and let 1:10's grammar answer it.
4. Handle the authorship question, if raised, with the leader-prep honesty: confident on canon, hedged where the Church hedges.

Leader Note

Time frame: 75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, Q2 and the Dig Deeper are the cuts; keep Q3, the ladder work in Q5, and the steelman chain.

Discussion Guide

Session Nine • Partakers of the Divine Nature • 2 Peter 1:1-11

Opening Prayer

Opening Prayer

Father, your divine power has granted us everything needed for life and godliness. Open tonight the promises you call precious and very great, and draw us up the ladder of your virtues, from faith all the way to love, until we share, by your gift, in your own nature. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Gathering In

- ◆ Finish this sentence honestly: “For me, being saved basically means ____.” No wrong answers tonight; we are taking inventory before Peter enlarges the map.
- ◆ What is a skill you deliberately built rung by rung, an instrument, a sport, a trade? What did the early rungs feel like compared to now?

Build: Working the Text

Leader Note

One-minute recap: the first letter closed with the restored shepherd writing from Rome. Tonight his testament begins, and it opens at the summit. Ask, wait, work, confirm.

Movement One: The Summit Sentence (1:1-4)

Read: 2 Peter 1:1-4 (from participants' own Bibles)

- Q1.** Verse 1 addresses “those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Two things hide in this greeting. First: whose faith has “equal standing” with the apostles' own, and what does that mean for people like us, twenty centuries late? Second: read the last six words slowly. What is Jesus called?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

First: ordinary converts who never saw Galilee hold a faith of equal standing, equally precious, with eyewitness apostles; there are no second-class Christians and no nostalgia advantage; your faith is not a lesser edition (cf. Jn 20:29). Second: Jesus is called, in one breath, “our God and Savior”; in the Greek, one article binds both titles to one person. The fisherman who confessed “you are the Christ” at Caesarea Philippi writes the full conclusion at the end of his life. Divinity is not a fourth-century invention; it is the letterhead of this epistle.

- Q2.** Verse 3: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.” Check the tense of the verb. What has already been issued, and what does that do to the most common excuse in the spiritual life: “I just don't have what it takes to be holy”?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Past tense: has granted; the equipment for godliness is already in your kit, supplied “through the knowledge of him who called us.” The excuse dissolves: holiness is not reserved for people issued a special temperament; every baptized person has been issued the divine power itself (grace, the sacraments, the Spirit). The honest question shifts from “do I have what it takes?” to “am I using what I was given?”, which is exactly where Peter's ladder is about to take us.

- Q3.** Verse 4 says the promises were given “that you may become partakers of the divine nature.”

Scripture has been straining toward this from the start. Look up two texts and read them aloud: Genesis 1:26-27 and then Psalm 82:6 with John 10:34-36. What destiny is written into humanity's creation, and what does Jesus do with the psalm's shocking line “you are gods”?

Leader Note

Discovery moment. If they stall on John 10: to whom does Jesus say the psalm applied (those to whom the word of God came), and what is he arguing about himself?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

From page one, humanity is made “in our image, after our likeness”: built for communion with God. Psalm 82 dares to call the bearers of God's word “gods, sons of the Most High,” and Jesus, far from softening it, wields it: if Scripture called them gods, how much more may the consecrated Son say “I am the Son of God” (Jn 10:34-36). Peter's 1:4 is where the trajectory lands: by grace, not by nature, creatures are given real participation (*koinōnoi*, the sharing word) in God's own life. Note the serpent's counterfeit: “you will be like God” by grasping (Gen 3:5). The true version is the same destiny received as gift, on God's terms, in Christ.

- Q4.** Let the claim land. Many of us learned to define salvation as acquittal: my sins forgiven, my sentence commuted. Verse 4 says the goal is participation in God's own nature. What is the difference between a pardoned criminal and an adopted, transformed son? Which gospel is bigger, and which have you been living in?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A pardoned criminal walks free but unchanged, standing outside the judge's house; an adopted son lives inside it, bears the name, and grows into the family likeness, sharing the very life of the Father. Pardon is real and necessary, and it is the porch, not the house. The Fathers made divinization the definition of salvation: St. Athanasius, the Son of God became man that we might become God; St. Irenaeus, he became what we are to bring us to what he is; St. Thomas, that he, made man, might make men gods (the three witnesses the Church gathers under this verse, CCC 460, which cites a companion Irenaeus line from *Against Heresies* III.19.1). Grace is not a substance God hands you instead of himself; it is his own life, shared (CCC 1997). This is also why the Eucharist matters supremely: partaking is not a metaphor at the altar rail.

Movement Two: The Ladder (1:5-9)

Read: 2 Peter 1:5-9 *(from participants' own Bibles)*

- Q5.** Verses 5-7 build an eight-rung ladder: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, love. Work the order in pairs: why does each rung need the one before it? Test at least three joints (for example: why does knowledge need self-control after it? why must godliness pass through brotherly affection before reaching love?). Then, privately: which rung are you standing on?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The joints hold under pressure: faith without virtue is conviction without courage (belief that never costs anything); virtue without knowledge is zeal without discernment (courage aimed wrong); knowledge without self-control is insight that appetite overrules (knowing better and doing worse); self-control without steadfastness is a strong week followed by collapse; steadfastness without godliness

is white-knuckle stoicism with no Godward face; godliness without brotherly affection is piety that is cold at close range; and affection for the brethren must widen into agapē, love even of enemies, or it remains tribal warmth. The ladder starts in grace (faith) and ends in God's own life (love), which is the divine nature of verse 4 expressed as character. Let the private question sit; no one reports out unless they wish to.

- Q6.** Verse 9 diagnoses the Christian who stalls: “blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.” Notice where spiritual nearsightedness begins, according to Peter. What does forgetting your baptism have to do with losing your vision, and what did we learn in Session Six that this verse assumes?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The stall begins with amnesia: forget what happened at the font (that you were truly cleansed, born anew, joined to the Risen One, Session Six's 3:21) and the horizon shrinks to the visible and immediate; you become shortsighted, living for the week instead of the kingdom. Memory is spiritual optics: the person who remembers what they already are can see where they are going. This is why the Church keeps handing you your baptism: holy water at the door, the Creed, Easter's renewal of promises. The cure for the stalled rung is rarely more willpower; it is usually better memory.

Movement Three: Confirm Your Call (1:10-11)

Read: 2 Peter 1:10-11 *(from participants' own Bibles)*

- Q7.** Verse 10 says “if you do this you will never fall.” Many devout Christians read promises like this as eternal security: once genuinely saved, a person cannot finally fall, and any zeal afterward is gratitude, never necessity. Build that reading as strongly as you can, from its best texts. What genuinely supports it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

At full strength: salvation is God's work from first to last (Eph 2:8-9); Jesus promises that no one can snatch his sheep from his hand (Jn 10:28-29); Paul is confident that he who began a good work will complete it (Phil 1:6); and a salvation that could be lost by human weakness seems to make God's grip depend on ours. On this reading, “you will never fall” is a settled guarantee, and the zeal of verse 10 is the fruit of assurance, not its condition. Say it that fairly; these are real texts and this reading honors God's sovereignty. Steel, not straw.

- Q8.** Now press it with tonight's verse itself. Read 1:10 again slowly: what is the grammatical mood of “be the more zealous to confirm your call and election,” and what little word makes the promise conditional? Why would Peter command us to confirm something that could not fail? And check verses 8-9: what two conditions does Peter say are possible for a genuine, cleansed Christian?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The verse is an imperative resting on a conditional: be zealous to confirm, for if you do this you will never fall. The strongest eternal-security reply is ready for this: God preserves his elect precisely through such commands, so the imperative is the appointed means of the guarantee, not evidence against it. Grant that the reply is coherent, then look at what Peter says can actually happen. And verses 8-9 say a truly cleansed Christian can become “ineffective,” “unfruitful,” blind, forgetful, which is why the warning exists (the darker case arrives in 2:20-22, Session Eleven): people who had escaped the defilements of the world and are again entangled and overcome. Peter treats falling as a live outcome for the cleansed, not a hypothetical God merely dangles as a tool, and that is what the means-of-preservation reading must flatten. The Catholic synthesis keeps every text: God's grip is stronger than ours and no one can snatch us from his hand, and we remain free to walk out of it; therefore assurance without presumption, hope without anxiety. The Church's counsel is Peter's: hope for and beg the grace of final perseverance (CCC 2016, 2849), and confirm the election daily with the zeal of verse 5. Notice the destination for the zealous: not a squeaked-through entrance but one “richly provided” into the eternal kingdom (1:11).

Send: Carrying It Out

- ◆ You privately located your rung on the ladder. What is one concrete practice, small enough to actually do, that works on exactly that rung this month?
- ◆ If salvation is participation in God's own life, what changes about why you go to Mass, and what you think is happening at Communion?

Live It This Week

This week: (1) Memorize 2 Peter 1:4 (from “he has granted” through “divine nature”). (2) Each morning, name your rung and ask for its grace in one sentence. (3) Before Communion this Sunday, pray St. Thomas's line: you assumed our nature to make us sharers in yours. (4) Write the eight rungs on a card and keep it where you will see it; we will meet the ladder's final rung again in Session Twelve.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Savior, you became what we are to bring us to what you are. Grant us zeal to confirm the call you spoke over us, supply each rung of the climb, and provide for us richly, at the last, an entrance into your eternal kingdom. Amen.

Scripture Memory

“... he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4, RSV2CE)

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in this session

Primary text

2 Peter 1:1-11 (movements: 1-4, 5-9, 10-11)

Discovery passages (read aloud in session)

Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 82:6 with John 10:34-36 (the trajectory toward 1:4)

Leader background and steelman texts

Genesis 3:5 (the counterfeit); 1 John 3:2 (consummation); John 20:29 (equal standing)

Ephesians 2:8-9; John 10:28-29; Philippians 1:6 (build); 2 Peter 1:8-9; 2:20-22 (press)

Philippians 2:12-13 (grace funds effort); Titus 2:13; John 1:1; 20:28 (divinity parallels)

Threads

NEW: growth arc (1:5) closes at 3:18 (Session Twelve); knowledge (epignōsis) recurs Sessions Ten to Twelve

Baptismal memory (1:9) reaches back to 3:21 (Session Six)

Catechism

CCC 460; 1996-1997; 2008-2010; 2016; 2849