

SESSION ONE

The Fisherman

John 1:35-42; Luke 5:1-11

PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that Jesus renames Simon at their very first meeting, that in Scripture a God-given name change always carries a covenant mission, and that Simon's call from the fishing boats begins a transformation whose destination the Gospels will only slowly reveal.

Catholic Touchstone: Vocation. Grace builds on nature and calls the unlikely: Jesus chooses a working fisherman, renames him before he has done anything to deserve it, and begins shaping him for an office the whole study will uncover (CCC 551).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The renaming happens at first sight. In John 1:42, before Simon has said a recorded word, Jesus looks at him and declares: "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). *Kepha* is Aramaic for rock; *Petros* is its Greek rendering. Jesus does not describe Simon; he assigns him a future. No one else in the Gospels receives a new name this way. Jesus does surname James and John *Boanerges*, "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17), but that nickname never displaces their names. Peter becomes his dominant name, so dominant that most Christians forget he ever had another, though "Simon" and "Simon Peter" remain in use, including on Jesus' own lips at pivotal moments (Matthew 16:17; Luke 22:31; John 21:15).

As a personal name, *Kepha* is all but unattested before Jesus; the same is essentially true of *Petros*. Jesus did not pick a common name off the shelf. He coined one, roughly like naming a man Boulder. When Scripture does something this strange, the strangeness is the message, and this study exists to unpack it.

The pattern of divine renaming is ancient and consistent: Abram becomes Abraham, "father of a multitude" (Genesis 17:5); Jacob becomes Israel (Genesis 32:28). When God renames, God commissions, and the new name is the job description. Tonight the group discovers the pattern; what mission the name Rock carries is next session's summit. Do not front-run it.

Luke 5:1-11 gives the call in full color. Notice whose boat Jesus chooses to teach from: Simon's, specifically (5:3). Then the impossible catch, and Simon's collapse: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (5:8). Jesus answers the confession with a commission: "Do not be afraid; henceforth you

will be catching men" (5:10). Confessed sinfulness is not a disqualifier in Scripture; it is regularly step one of a vocation. Hold that pattern; it returns with force late in this study.

Peter's sheer prominence in the New Testament is itself data. He is named nearly two hundred times, several times more than any other apostle. In every list of the Twelve he is first and Judas is last, and Matthew makes it explicit: "first, Simon, who is called Peter" (Matthew 10:2), *prōtos*, though he was not the first called chronologically. The evangelists, writing decades later in different communities, all agree on the spotlight, including its harshest moments. Whatever the Gospels think Peter is, they think it loudly.

One more early thread: St. Paul, writing Greek to Greek-speaking churches, still calls him *Kephas* again and again (1 Corinthians 1:12; 15:5; Galatians 1:18; 2:9). The Aramaic name traveled the whole Mediterranean untranslated. Everyone knew who the Rock was.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Genesis 17:5 and 32:28. God renames Abram and Jacob at covenant hinge points, and each new name carries the mission: father of a multitude, striver with God. Divine renaming is never cosmetic. Tonight's live discovery.

Isaiah 6:1-8. Isaiah sees the Lord, cries "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips," is cleansed, and only then hears and answers the sending. Encounter, confession, reassurance, commission: the same essential sequence as Luke 5, though Isaiah alone receives the cleansing coal; in Luke, Jesus' "Do not be afraid" carries the reassurance.

Jeremiah 16:16. "Behold, I am sending for many fishers, says the LORD, and they shall catch them." In Jeremiah's immediate context the fishers seek out a sinful people whom God will not let escape (16:17-18), yet the oracle stands directly after the promise of a new exodus regathering Israel from all the lands (16:14-15). Fishing for people is God's own language for seeking out his scattered people, in judgment and in mercy. When Jesus says "catching men," he takes up that prophetic image and turns it wholly to good news: the great regathering has begun, and Simon is hired.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

Preaching on John 1:42, Chrysostom marvels that the Lord declares Simon's future name at their first meeting. By telling him what he shall be called, Christ shows both his divine foreknowledge and his intent: he is already shaping the fisherman into what the name promises, beginning the work before Simon has taken a single step.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose *Exposition of the Gospel of Luke, Book IV*

Ambrose lingers over the detail that Jesus teaches the crowd from Simon's boat. It was fitting, he says, that the Lord should teach from Peter's vessel: in that boat Ambrose sees a figure of the Church, from which Christ instructs the world, and the deep water into which Simon is told to launch is the depth of the mission still ahead.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies, Book III*

Irenaeus records that Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, handed down in writing what Peter had preached. If that early tradition is right, then the vivid, humbling detail of Peter's story in Mark's Gospel, most of it unflattering, goes back to Peter's own preaching, which would mean the Rock told the Church his failures himself. Irenaeus does not draw that conclusion; it follows from the tradition he preserves, and it is its own kind of credential.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 551 teaches that when Jesus chose the Twelve to share in his mission and authority, he gave Simon a unique place within them, a place this study will trace text by text.

CCC 858-860 presents the apostles as sent ones who carry Christ's own mission and make him present, the foundation on which everything later in this study stands.

CCC 1, 27 frame the deeper point of tonight's call narrative: God freely calls human beings into his own life, and every vocation, Simon's included, begins in that initiative, not in human worthiness.

THREAD WATCH

The Fisherman-to-Shepherd thread (plant tonight, resolve Session Six). Simon enters the story as a fisherman and is commissioned to catch men. Before the Gospels end, Jesus will hand him a different job with a different image entirely, and it is the title of this study. Say nothing. Take-Home 1's first sealed blank asks the group to guess the job; it opens at Session Six.

The Job Posting thread (sealed guess, resolves Session Three). Hidden in the Old Testament is a detailed job description for the office Jesus will give Simon, keys included. Take-Home 1's second blank asks which prophet's book it hides in. It opens at Session Three, and the discovery is the summit of the study's first half. Guard Isaiah 22 completely until then.

The Confessed Sinner thread. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man" plants a pattern that returns at Session Nine, when the study faces Peter's failures head-on. Tonight, just make sure the Luke 5 sequence (encounter, confession, reassurance, commission) is clearly seen.

SESSION GOALS

1.

Establish the group covenant and the session rhythm, and name the study's driving question: what exactly did Jesus build on this particular man?

2.

Discover the renaming at John 1:42 and its Old Testament grammar through Genesis 17 and 32.

3.

Trace the Luke 5 call sequence and its Isaiah 6 pattern: confessed sin precedes commission.

4.

Distribute Take-Home 1 and make the double sealed guess ceremonial.

TIME NOTE

75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, cut Build 8 and compress the Peter-statistics question (Build 7) into a leader statement. Do not cut the sealed guess instructions; both threads depend on them.

PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you looked at a fisherman and saw a rock. You call the unlikely, you rename the unready, and you build with what the world overlooks. As we begin this study, give us Simon's honesty about our sin and Simon's readiness to leave the nets. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

1.

Do you have a nickname, or have you ever given one that stuck? What does it take for a name to actually replace someone's name?

2.

Think of a time someone saw potential in you that you could not yet see in yourself. What did their confidence do to you?

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

1.

Read John 1:35-42. Andrew finds his brother and brings him to Jesus. Watch verse 42 closely: what does Jesus do before Simon has said a single recorded word, and what is strange about it?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Jesus looks at him and renames him on the spot: "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). No interview, no trial period. The name is declared at first sight, as a future: "you shall be called."

No one else in the Gospels receives a new name this way. James and John get the nickname *Boanerges*, sons of thunder (Mark 3:17), but it never displaces their names. Peter becomes his dominant name from here on, so dominant that most people forget he was ever anyone else, even though "Simon" still appears at key moments. Jesus is not describing this man; he is assigning him something.

2.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Two readers: find Genesis 17:5 and Genesis 32:28. In Scripture, when God changes someone's name, what always comes with the new name? So what should we expect the name Rock to carry?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Abram becomes Abraham because God is making him "the father of a multitude of nations": the name is the covenant role. Jacob becomes Israel at the hinge of his life. Divine renaming is never a rebrand; the new name is the commission, spoken before it is achieved.

So the name Rock must carry a mission, and the honest answer tonight is that we do not yet know what it is. The Gospels will define it, and so will this study. Resist the urge to skip ahead; the discovery is worth the wait.

3.

Here is a strange fact: as far as the surviving records show, *Kepha* was all but unheard of as a personal name before Jesus used it, and the same is essentially true of the Greek *Petros*. What does it tell us that Jesus coined a name rather than choosing one?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

It would be roughly like renaming a friend Boulder. Nobody was named Rock, which means Jesus was not reaching for something familiar; he was creating a designation that had no history and therefore no meaning except the one he would give it.

That also means every later reader has to ask the question the way the first hearers did: not "which Rock is he?" but "what is a Rock for?" Buildings come to mind. Hold that thought until next week.

4.

Read Luke 5:1-3. Two boats are sitting there. Whose boat does Jesus get into to teach the crowd, and does Luke bother to tell us? Why might that detail matter?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Luke names it: "getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's," he taught the people from it. Of two available boats, the Lord teaches from Simon's, and Luke thought the detail worth preserving.

St. Ambrose loved this verse: he saw in Peter's boat a figure of the Church, the vessel from which Christ teaches the world. Whether or not every hearer goes that far tonight, the pattern is beginning: when Jesus wants a platform, he keeps choosing this particular fisherman's things, and eventually this particular fisherman.

5.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Read Luke 5:4-8. The catch happens, and Simon falls down: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Someone find and read Isaiah 6:1-8. What sequence do the two scenes share?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Isaiah sees the Lord and cries "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips." A coal touches his mouth, guilt departs, and only then comes "Whom shall I send?" and "Here am I! Send me."

Encounter, confession of sin, reassurance, commission. Luke 5 runs the same sequence, minus the coal (Jesus' own word "Do not be afraid" does the reassuring): glory, "I am a sinful man," "do not be afraid," "henceforth you will be catching men."

Notice what the pattern means: in Scripture, confessed sinfulness is not the end of a vocation; it is routinely the beginning of one. In these call narratives, God's call lands precisely on people who know their sin; honesty about unworthiness, not self-assurance, is the recurring starting point. Remember this sequence; this study will need it badly in a few weeks.

6.

LIVE DISCOVERY. "Catching men" sounds like a metaphor Jesus made up on the beach. Someone find and read Jeremiah 16:16. Where does the image actually come from, and what was it for?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

"Behold, I am sending for many fishers, says the LORD, and they shall catch them." In Jeremiah the image cuts two ways: the fishers seek out a people who cannot hide from God, yet it stands beside God's promise to bring his scattered people home (16:14-15). Fishing for people is prophetic language for God seeking out Israel.

So when Jesus says "henceforth you will be catching men," he is not coining a cute image; he is announcing that the promised regathering has begun and hiring Simon into it. The fisherman's nets were always pointed at this.

7.

Some quick data. Peter is named nearly two hundred times in the New Testament, several times more than any other apostle. Every list of the Twelve puts him first, and Matthew writes "first, Simon, who is called Peter" (Matthew 10:2) even though Andrew met Jesus before he did. What do we make of the spotlight?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Four evangelists, writing decades apart for different communities, all agree on where the light falls, and the word Matthew uses, *prōtos*, is not about chronology, since Simon was not called first. It marks position.

And the spotlight is not flattery: no figure in the Gospels is corrected, humbled, and exposed as often as Peter, and according to the early tradition St. Irenaeus preserves, Mark's Gospel records Peter's own preaching, which would mean Peter told these stories on himself. The prominence is not a legend growing later; it is the memory of the whole apostolic Church, failures included. The question this study asks is what that prominence is *for*.

8.

Last one, and let it breathe: Jesus renamed Simon before Simon had done anything, right or wrong. He commissioned him seconds after Simon confessed to being a sinful man. What does that tell us about how God calls, and about what disqualifies a person?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Let the group work. The landing: God's call is initiative, not recruitment of the already qualified. Grace precedes; the name comes before the worthiness; the commission comes right through the confession. "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16) is the grammar of every vocation in Scripture.

That means the disqualification most of us fear, our record, is precisely what the pattern refuses to treat as final. This study is about an office, but the office is built on a called sinner, and that is not an embarrassment to the design. It is the design.

SEND · TAKING IT WITH US

1.

Jesus saw a rock in a fisherman. What might he see in you that you have trouble seeing? Say it to him this week, even if you cannot yet believe it.

2.

Simon's call started when his brother Andrew simply brought him to Jesus. Who is one person you could be Andrew for this month?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Look up the meaning of your baptismal or confirmation name this week, and pray each morning: "Lord, you knew my name before I did; make me what you named me."

2.

Read Luke 5:1-11 once more on your own, slowly, placing yourself in the boat. Write down the one line that lands hardest.

3.

Begin a habit this study will keep: pray one Our Father each day for the pope and his intentions. You do not have to feel anything about the papacy yet; just pray for the man.

Closing Prayer:

Father, you renamed Abram, you renamed Jacob, and your Son renamed Simon. You call before we are ready and you build with sinners who tell you the truth. Put out into the deep with us. Teach from our little boats. And make us unafraid of what you intend to call us. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse: "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter)." (John 1:42, RSV2CE)

PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session One, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Main text one, Build 1: the renaming at first sight

Mark 3:17

Leader background, Build 1: Boanerges contrast

Genesis 17:5

Live discovery, Build 2: Abram to Abraham

Genesis 32:28

Live discovery, Build 2: Jacob to Israel

Luke 5:1-11

Main text two, Builds 4-5: the boat, the catch, the call

Isaiah 6:1-8

Live discovery, Build 5: confession before commission

Jeremiah 16:16

Live discovery, Build 6: fishers sent to regather Israel

Matthew 10:2

Build 7: "first, Simon, who is called Peter"

1 Corinthians 1:12; 15:5; Galatians 1:18; 2:9

Leader background: Paul says Kephas

John 15:16

Build 8: you did not choose me

CCC 551; 858-860; 1; 27

Catechism Connection