

SESSION FIVE

Strengthen Your Brethren

Luke 22:24-34

PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that at the Last Supper itself, with a dispute about greatness still hanging in the air, Jesus prays for one disciple by name against Satan's demand to sift them all, and commissions that one, in full foreknowledge of his coming failure, to turn again and strengthen his brothers.

Catholic Touchstone: The Petrine ministry of confirming the brethren. Vatican I and the Catechism both read Luke 22:32 as the charter of Peter's task: to keep the faith of his brothers from failing, a strength that is Christ's prayer at work, not the man's own virtue (CCC 552; 641-642).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The scene's timing is the first shock. Luke places the dispute about greatness at the Last Supper itself: the Eucharist has just been instituted, the betrayal announced, and "a dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest" (22:24). Jesus answers not by abolishing greatness but by converting it: "let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves" (22:26). Notice that he assumes there is a greatest and a leader among them; what he overturns is the pagan style of it, lording and titles, not the existence of order. "I am among you as one who serves" (22:27) is the job description for every office this study has found.

Then the pronouns, which your group was primed to count. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat" (22:31): the you is plural, *hymas*, all of them. Satan's demand, echoing Job, targets the whole apostolic band. "But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (22:32): the you is singular, *sou*. Against an assault on all, Jesus prays for one. The defense of the many runs through the faith of the one, which is simply the rock and steward architecture of Sessions Two and Three, now deployed in spiritual warfare.

The commission completes it: "and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." Three staggering admissions live in that clause. Jesus knows Peter will fall ("when you have turned again" presumes a fall to turn from); the fall does not revoke the office; and the office's purpose is defined as strengthening the brothers, *stērisōn*, to make firm, to establish. Peter's job, given at the table of the first Eucharist, is to be the one whose Christ-prayed-for faith steadies everyone else's.

Immediately Peter overpromises: "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death" (22:33), and Jesus answers with the rooster. Hold the sequence honestly: the prayer, the commission, the bravado, the prediction of denial, all within four verses. Scripture itself refuses to let the Petrine ministry rest on Peter's self-confidence. It rests on the prayer of Christ, which is exactly why it can survive Peter. This is the deep grammar of the whole Catholic claim, and Session Nine will spend a full evening on it.

Note what Jesus does not pray: that Peter be spared the sifting, or that Peter never sin. He prays that Peter's *faith* not fail, *ekleipō*, give out, die away. Peter's courage will fail within hours; his faith, wounded and weeping, will not. The distinction between impeccability (never sinning), which no pope has ever had, and the protected confession of the faith, which Christ himself prays into the office, begins in this verse.

Vatican I quotes this passage directly in defining the Petrine ministry, and the Catechism follows (CCC 552): Peter's mission is to keep the faith of his brothers from failing and to strengthen them in it. When Catholics say the pope confirms the brethren, they are not reaching for a proof text after the fact; they are quoting the Last Supper.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Job 1:6-12. Satan demanding leave to sift a servant of God is Job's story retold: the accuser asks, and God permits a testing within limits. Luke 22:31 uses the same courtroom picture, with one difference that changes everything: this time, the Advocate prays for the accused by name before the test begins.

Amos 9:9. "I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve." Sifting is prophetic imagery for a violent testing that separates. The apostles are about to be shaken; the question is what remains in the sieve.

Isaiah 22:23-24. The steward is fastened "like a peg in a sure place," and on him hangs "the whole weight of his father's house." The image of one man bearing the household's weight so the household holds together is the steward's job description, and Luke 22:32 is its New Covenant form: the brothers' faith hangs on the one prayed for.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Leo the Great *Sermon 3, On His Birthday as Pope*

Leo preaches that the danger of the trial was common to all the apostles, yet the Lord took special care of Peter, praying for Peter's faith in particular, as though the others would stand more surely if the mind of their chief were not overcome. In Peter, Leo says, the courage of all is fortified: Christ so arranged the gift that what he granted to one, he granted through that one to the whole body.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose *Commentary on Psalm 40*

Ambrose coins the maxim the Church never stopped repeating: where Peter is, there is the Church. For Ambrose this is not flattery of a man but confidence in a design: Christ attached the unity and steadiness of his flock to the one he prayed for, so that finding Peter is finding the place where the brethren are strengthened.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Bede the Venerable *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*

Bede observes that the Lord, who foreknew the denial, did not cancel the commission but built it around the fall: Peter is told to strengthen his brothers precisely as one who has turned again. The shepherd of the weak, Bede teaches, was permitted to know weakness in himself first, so that his strengthening of others would be mercy speaking, not superiority.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 552 reads tonight's verse as Peter's charter: because of his faith, prayed for by Christ, Peter's mission is to keep the faith of his brothers from failing and to strengthen them in it.

CCC 641-642 notes that after the Resurrection, Peter is the first apostolic witness to whom the risen Lord appears (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5), the one whose confirmed faith then confirms the others, the commission of Luke 22 already in motion on Easter day.

CCC 2600 points out how often Luke shows Jesus praying before the decisive moments of his ministry and of Peter's: the whole Petrine office is suspended from a thread, and the thread is the prayer of Christ, which cannot fail.

THREAD WATCH

The Failing Steward thread tightens. Tonight Jesus himself predicts the failure and pre-loads the recovery: "when you have turned again." Do not resolve the tension; Session Nine owns it. If the group wants to talk denials tonight, note the rooster and promise the full reckoning.

The Fisherman-to-Shepherd thread: one week out. "Strengthen your brethren" is a shepherding verb wearing a disguise, and next session the disguise comes off with the first sealed blank. Say absolutely nothing about animals.

The Revealed Confession thread advances. Session Two planted "flesh and blood has not revealed this"; tonight adds "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." The two verses are the twin pillars of Session Twelve. Underline tonight's and keep walking.

SESSION GOALS

1.

See the setting: the dispute about greatness at the Eucharistic table, and greatness converted to service rather than abolished.

2.

Discover the plural-singular pronoun shift of 22:31-32 and articulate its architecture: the many defended through the one.

3.

Distinguish what Jesus prays for (faith that does not fail) from what he does not (a Peter who never falls), and mark the distinction for Sessions Nine and Twelve.

4.

Hold the full sequence honestly: prayer, commission, bravado, rooster, all four verses together.

TIME NOTE

75 to 90 minutes. If time runs short, compress Build 1 and cut Build 8. Protect Build 3, the pronoun discovery, and Build 6, the faith-versus-courage distinction; they are the night's cargo.

PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer:

Lord Jesus, on the night you were betrayed, you looked at weakness and prayed for it by name. Pray for us tonight. When we are sifted, hold our faith together, and when we have turned again, make us strength for our brothers. You are among us as one who serves; teach us that greatness and no other. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

1.

Have you ever been publicly confident about something and then failed at it fast? How long did it take you to live it down, with others or with yourself?

2.

Who is the person whose steadiness steadies you, the one whose faith keeps yours standing in bad weather? What do they actually do?

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

1.

Read Luke 22:24-27 and wince with me: where and when is this argument about greatness happening? And watch Jesus' answer closely: does he say there is no greatest, or something stranger?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

It erupts at the Last Supper: the Eucharist just instituted, the betrayal just announced, and the Twelve are ranking themselves. Luke's honesty about the apostles is brutal and wonderful; these are the men Christ builds with.

And Jesus' answer is stranger than abolition: "let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves." He speaks as if there is a greatest and a leader among them, and converts the office rather than canceling it. What he forbids is the Gentile style, lording it and collecting titles. The measure of rank in his kingdom is the towel: "I am among you as one who serves." Every office this study has found lives under that sentence.

2.

Read 22:28-30. Before the warning comes a bestowal: what does Jesus assign to the Twelve, and what does it tell us about the shape of his kingdom?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

"As my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." He confers, *diatithemai*, covenant language, a kingdom with a table and thrones: real, structured authority in the restored Israel.

So the correction of verse 26 was not egalitarian mush. Minutes after rebuking their status-grabbing, Jesus hands them thrones. The kingdom has order; the order has a style, service; and the Twelve govern as judges of the new Israel. Now watch what he does with one of them.

3.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Read 22:31-32 with your homework in hand: you counted the pronouns. Who does Satan demand? Who does Jesus pray for? Say the grammar out loud and then say what it means.

ANSWER · share after the discussion

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have *you*," and the you is plural, *hymas*: all of them, the whole apostolic band, demanded for the sieve like Job before the accuser. "But I have prayed for *you* that your faith may not fail," and the you is singular, *sou*: one man, named twice.

Against an assault on all, Jesus concentrates his prayer on one, and gives the reason in the next clause: so that the one, turned again, can strengthen the rest. The defense of the many is routed through the faith of the one. That is not a Catholic gloss; it is the sentence's own architecture, and it is the rock of Session Two and the steward of Session Three now deployed in spiritual warfare.

4.

Stay in verse 32. List what Jesus does *not* pray for, and let it get uncomfortable. Then: what exactly does "when you have turned again" quietly admit?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

He does not pray that Peter be spared the sifting. He does not pray that Peter not sin, not stumble, not deny. He prays one thing: "that your faith may not fail," *ekleipō*, give out, go dark. The prayer is terrifyingly narrow and therefore unbreakable.

And "when you have turned again" admits the fall in advance: there is no turning again without a turning away. Jesus commissions Peter with the denial already in view, builds the office around the wound before the wound exists. Whatever the Petrine ministry rests on, we now know what it is not: Peter's reliability. It rests on a prayer, and the one praying does not fail.

5.

Now read 22:33-34 and hold all four verses together as one unit: prayer, commission, bravado, rooster. What does Peter's "I am ready to go with you to prison and to death" reveal about where his confidence is placed, and what does the sequence teach?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Peter answers a promise of Christ's prayer with a promise of his own performance: I am ready. He relocates the ground of his standing from Christ's intercession to his own courage, and Jesus answers the relocation with a timestamp: before the cock crows today, three denials.

The sequence is the lesson: self-confidence is the one foundation the office is never allowed to have. Luke has given us, in four verses, the entire Catholic grammar of the papacy: an office established in full foreknowledge of its holder's sin, guaranteed by Christ's prayer and nothing else, aimed entirely at the brothers' strength. Everything Session Nine will say about failure, and Session Twelve about protection, is already sitting in this paragraph.

6.

Sharpen the crucial distinction: within hours Peter's courage fails completely, three denials by a fire. Did his *faith* fail? What is the difference, and how do we know from the story's end?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

His nerve collapsed; his faith, wounded, did not die. The first sign is the weeping (22:62), the grief of a believer who still loves the one he betrayed; the proof is the story's end: Peter turns again, is sought out by the risen Lord (Luke 24:34), and is restored at the shore (John 21). Despair walks away for good; wounded faith comes back. Judas's sifting ends in a field (Matthew 27:3-10; Acts 1:18-19); Peter's ends at a breakfast (John 21:9-19). The difference between the two men is not the size of the sin; it is whether faith survived the sifting.

Name the distinction precisely, because centuries of confusion live here: the Church has never claimed popes cannot sin (impeccability); the claim, whose roots are in this verse, concerns the protected confession of the faith. Christ prayed for Peter's faith, not his flawlessness. What that protection came to mean, and what it never meant, is Session Twelve's whole evening. Tonight we only need the seed: the

prayer targets the faith.

7.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Someone find and read Job 1:6-12, then look back at Luke 22:31. What is the same, and what one thing is gloriously different?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The same: the accuser appears before God demanding to test a servant, and permission is granted within limits. Satan "demanded to have you": the courtroom of Job convenes again, this time over the whole apostolic college on the worst night of history.

The difference: Job never knew about the courtroom; God attested his integrity there (1:8), but Job himself was told nothing and endured the sifting uninformed. Simon is told in advance, by name, by the Advocate himself: I have prayed for you. The New Covenant's answer to the accuser is not information; it is intercession, and Hebrews says it never stops: "he always lives to make intercession" (Hebrews 7:25). The office is safe for exactly one reason: the Advocate does not lose cases.

DIG DEEPER · First to the risen Lord

Easter morning has a detail that is easy to miss: "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" (Luke 24:34), and Paul preserves the same order, "he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:5). Before the group on the road, before the eleven in the room, the risen Christ sought out the man who had denied him, alone, first. No Gospel narrates that meeting; the Church only knows it happened. The commission of Luke 22:32 was already running: the strengthener of the brethren had to be raised up first (CCC 641-642).

8.

Land it on us. "When you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" makes restored failures into the strengtheners of others. Where has that pattern been true in your own life, someone whose fall and turning became your strength, and where might your own turnings be meant for someone else?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Let the group carry this one; the pattern is everywhere once seen: the sponsor who drank, the mentor who lost a marriage and rebuilt, the confessor who understands because he has knelt on the other side of the screen. Strength that has never known the sieve comforts thinly; the brethren are strengthened most by the turned-again.

The landing: this is not merely Peter's biography, it is the Church's method. Christ staffs his household with restored deniers on purpose, so that every act of strengthening carries mercy's accent. Whatever your worst chapter is, verse 32 refuses to let it be wasted.

SEND · TAKING IT WITH US

1.

Jesus prayed for Simon by name before the worst night of his life. Whose name do you need to pray over this week, in advance of a sifting you can see coming for them?

2.

"I am ready" was the wrong answer; Peter had to be broken and restored before he could answer "you know that I love you" instead (John 21:15-17). Where are you still answering God with your resume instead of your need?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Each morning this week, pray Luke 22:32 with your own name in it: "Lord, you have prayed for me, that my faith may not fail." Let the day start from his prayer, not your readiness.

2.

Identify one brother or sister currently being sifted, and do one concrete strengthening act: a call, a meal, an hour, a Mass offered. Turned-again people are for this.

3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Lord, you prayed that Peter's faith not fail; keep the faith of his successor firm, and through him strengthen your brethren."

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Advocate who never loses, you saw the sieve coming and you prayed. Hold our faith together when our courage goes. Meet us on the far side of our failures as you met Simon, and make every one of our turnings into strength for somebody else. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse: "But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." (Luke 22:32, RSV2CE)

PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

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

PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Main text, read in units through the Build

Job 1:6-12

Live discovery, Build 7: the accuser's courtroom

Amos 9:9

Leader background: sifting as prophetic testing

Isaiah 22:23-24

Leader background: the household's weight on the peg

Luke 22:62

Build 6: the weeping that proves faith survived

Hebrews 7:25

Build 7: he always lives to make intercession

Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5

Dig Deeper: risen Lord appears to Simon first

CCC 552; 641-642; 2600

Catechism Connection