

Session 7: The First Charcoal Fire

Luke 22:54-62 and John 18:15-18, 25-27 | 75 to 90 minutes | Young Adult Inductive Study

PART ONE: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: The group walks with Peter into his worst hour and discovers how a sincere man falls: by degrees, at a distance, warming himself in the wrong company, ambushed by small tests after passing large ones. They discover that the fall was foretold inside a promise of refining and reunion, and they meet the look of Christ that breaks a heart open rather than breaking it.

Catholic Touchstone: “Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). Even the redeemed can fall, and presumption is the usual door. But the Catechism reads this very night as the anatomy of conversion: Jesus' look of infinite mercy drew tears of repentance from Peter (CCC 1429). The look that catches us in sin is the same look that refuses to let us go.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Lead this session gently. Statistically, someone at your table is carrying a denial of their own, recent or ancient, and tonight will find it. The goal is not to make anyone feel Peter's shame; it is to walk everyone through Peter's shame to the look that answers it. Keep the room unhurried and merciful.

The fall happens by degrees, and the degrees are the lesson. First, Gethsemane: Peter, told to watch and pray lest he enter into temptation, sleeps (Mark 14:37-38; cf. Luke 22:45-46); the battle was lost in the garden before it was fought in the courtyard. Second, the flash of the old boldness: Peter draws a sword and strikes (John 18:10 names him); he really was ready to die fighting. But the test that came was not the test he had rehearsed. Third, the distance: “Peter followed at a distance” (Luke 22:54), braver than the men who fled outright, and that partial courage carries him into the danger zone with his strength already spent. Fourth, the fire: it was cold, and the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, and “Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself” (John 18:18). Note St. John's specific word: *anthrakia*, a charcoal fire. Say nothing about it beyond what the session needs; simply make sure the group sees it and smells it. Comfort in the wrong company, at the wrong fire, is the posture of the fall.

Then the ambush. Not a soldier, not the high priest: a servant girl at the gate, glancing at his face in the firelight. “This man also was with him.” And the man who drew a sword against a detachment of troops folds before a girl: “Woman, I do not know him” (Luke 22:57). The denials escalate; in Matthew's account the second comes with an oath and the third with a curse invoked on himself (Matthew 26:72,

74). Sin compounds; each denial makes the next one cheaper, and by the third he is spending words he could not have imagined an hour before. Then the cock crows, “and the Lord turned and looked at Peter” (Luke 22:61), a detail only Luke preserves. No word is spoken. Peter “remembered the word of the Lord... and he went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:61-62). Everything now hangs on what kind of look that was and what kind of weeping follows it, and the session deliberately leaves that question half-open: it is next week's entire subject. Resist the urge to resolve it tonight; end in the dark with Peter, held only by Luke 22:32.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Zechariah 13:7-9 (the live discovery text; do not preview it). Hours before the courtyard, Jesus quoted Zechariah to the Eleven: “You will all fall away because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee” (Matthew 26:31-32). The group will read the Zechariah oracle itself and discover what stands directly after the striking and scattering: “I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them” (Zechariah 13:9). The scattering is not the end of the oracle; refining and reunion are inside it, and Jesus attached a Galilee appointment to the prophecy before anyone fell.

Psalm 51. David's Miserere is the vocabulary of the broken heart that God will not despise; verse 17 is tonight's memory verse and the only safe ground to end on.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Ambrose of Milan / *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke, Book X*

On Peter's weeping, St. Ambrose is the Church's tenderest reader: he finds no recorded words of Peter's repentance, no speech, no formula, only tears, and he treats the tears as sufficient: what words could not dare to confess, weeping confessed, and the tears washed the fault that the voice could not bring itself to name. For Ambrose, Peter's tears are the model of compunction: grief that flows toward the wounded Lord rather than away from Him, and is itself received as prayer.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom / *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew, Homily 85*

St. Chrysostom refuses to let his hearers sneer at Peter, and he names the mechanics of the fall with a physician's precision: the boast had leaned on self, sleep had disarmed prayer, and the fear of a little servant girl accomplished what armed men could not, so that Peter might learn, and we through him, the measure of human weakness left to itself. Yet Chrysostom will not end in the wound: the fall of the chief of the apostles was permitted, he says, so that no sinner after him need ever despair of the remedy.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Francis de Sales | Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III, Chapter 9 (“On Gentleness towards Ourselves”)

The gentle Doctor's counsel for the morning after every fall could have been written at this fire: when we have fallen, we must not fall also into bitter, anxious rage against ourselves, for that second fall, wounded pride disguised as contrition, serves no one but the enemy. Rise quickly, quietly, without amazement that weakness proved weak; grieve before God with a grief that is calm, full of hope, and set to work again. This is the constant theme of his spiritual direction: our falls, met this way, teach us two things at once, a just distrust of ourselves and a whole trust in God.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1429:** The Catechism reads this very scene as the pattern of interior conversion: St. Peter's conversion after his denial; Jesus' look of infinite mercy drawing tears of repentance, and, after the resurrection, the threefold affirmation of love. Tonight the group lives the first half of that sentence.
- **CCC 1851:** In the Passion, sin shows its every face, and the Catechism's list includes Peter's denial: our sins were present at the trial of Jesus, and they were what His mercy came for.
- **CCC 1451:** Contrition: sorrow of soul and detestation of sin, with the resolution not to sin again. Peter's bitter weeping is contrition before it has words.

THE WAY OF SALVATION (STUDY STRAND, LEADER ONLY)

MOVEMENT 7 OF THE KERYGMA: THE DEPTH OF SIN, EVEN IN THE REDEEMED

The kerygma tells the truth about sin, and tonight the truth is that disciples fall. Didactic texts: 1 Corinthians 10:12 (let him who thinks he stands take heed); Proverbs 16:18 (pride before the fall). The pastoral center: sin's gravity and mercy's greater gravity must be held together, and tonight deliberately ends with the question of which weeping saves, unresolved, so that next session can answer it with the whole weight of the Gospel. Do not resolve it early; the ache is doing the teaching. Do not teach this strand aloud.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY, NEVER REVEAL)

- **The charcoal fire.** John's word anthrakia. Make certain the group registers the fire vividly (Question 3 does this), and say ABSOLUTELY NOTHING more about it. This is the study's longest fuse and its detonation belongs entirely to the group, two sessions from now.
- **The pattern replayed at scale.** Bold start, wavering attention, collapse, and (coming) cry and rescue: the walking-on-water rhythm from Session 2, life-sized. If a participant sees it, celebrate; do not point it out yourself.

- **Luke 22:32 is the floor.** The group memorized it last week for this exact night. The discussion guide has them stand on it at the end.
- **Galilee.** “I will go before you to Galilee” (Matthew 26:32) is the appointment mercy made before the fall. It resolves across the next two sessions. Say nothing.
- **Sealed guess.** Standing dismissal reminder; two sessions from now they must BRING the sheet.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group traces the anatomy of the fall by degrees: prayerlessness, the wrong test, the distance, the fire, the ambush, the compounding.
2. The group discovers Zechariah 13:7-9 and finds refining and reunion inside the very oracle of the scattering.
3. The group encounters the look of Christ (Luke 22:61) and begins, without resolving it, the question of the two kinds of weeping.
4. Each participant identifies their own “distance and fire”: where partial courage and wrong comfort put them in the danger zone.
5. Distribute Take-Home 7; the room ends held by Luke 22:32.

TIME NOTE

Core session runs about 75 minutes. If long: cut one Win question and the second Dig Deeper. **Do not cut** the Zechariah discovery or Question 6; and do not rush the silence after the look. This session should end quietly, a few minutes early if anything.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, tonight we follow at a distance with Simon, into the cold courtyard, to the fire where he warmed himself among your enemies. We do not come to judge him; we know the way too well. You prayed for him that his faith would not fail; pray for us. And when the cock crows over our own denials, turn and look at us, Lord, with the look that breaks hearts open and not apart. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

Open questions; every answer is welcome. Keep the tone gentle tonight.

W1. Have you ever prepared hard for one test and then been ambushed by a completely different one? What happened?

W2. What is easier for you: a big dramatic act of courage, or small unglamorous faithfulness when nobody is watching? Why do you think that is?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

READ ALOUD: Luke 22:54-62 (ask the room for slow, unhurried reading)

1. Before the courtyard, rewind two hours. In Gethsemane, Jesus found Peter sleeping and said to him, “Simon, are you asleep?... Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Mark 14:37-38; cf. Luke 22:45-46). Then when the soldiers came, Peter drew a sword and struck (John names him, 18:10). Put those two facts side by side: asleep in prayer, awake with a sword. What do they tell us about the test Peter had prepared for versus the test that came?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Peter had rehearsed dying in battle: the blaze of loyalty, the drawn sword, the glorious end, and he was genuinely ready for that test. He passed it, in fact, for about one swing. But the battle was lost earlier, in the garden, where the weapon that mattered was prayer and he slept through the armory. The test that actually came was not glory but attrition: cold, tired, anonymous hours where courage has no adrenaline to run on. The group should hold this diagnostic all night: we usually fall not at the test we feared but at the one we never thought to pray about, and prayerlessness today is the quiet first act of tomorrow's denial.

2. Verse 54: “Peter followed at a distance.” Give him his due: most of the others fled outright (John 18:15 tells of one other disciple who also followed); Peter turned back toward the danger. So what is “at a distance”: courage, or the beginning of the fall, or both?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Both, and that is what makes it so recognizable. Peter's love is real: it drags him toward the danger everyone else fled. But it is love operating at the range where he hopes to stay connected without being identified, close enough to watch, far enough to be safe. And partial courage is uniquely dangerous: it carries a man into the enemy's courtyard with his strength already spent and his identity already half-hidden. Most of us do not abandon Christ outright; we follow at a distance: believing quietly, editing ourselves in the wrong rooms, keeping the connection but managing the exposure. Tonight shows where the distance leads if it is not closed.

3. Read John's detail: it was cold, and the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, “and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself” (John 18:18). Paint the scene with your senses for a moment: the dark, the cold, the smell of charcoal, the firelight

on faces. What is wrong with this picture, and why does an evangelist writing decades later remember the fire so specifically?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

What is wrong: Peter is warming himself at the enemies' fire, taking comfort from the company of the people arresting his Lord, his face lit by their light. Nobody plans a denial; we drift into the geography of one: cold and tired, we accept warmth wherever it is offered, and comfort in the wrong company quietly recalibrates what we are willing to say when asked. As for why John remembers the fire so precisely: eyewitnesses remember sensory details from the worst nights of the people they love, and the "other disciple" who was in that courtyard (18:15-16) has been identified by tradition as John himself. Leave it exactly there. Let the group see the fire, smell it, and move on.

4. Now the ambush. Not a soldier with a sword, which Peter was ready for: a servant girl at the gate, glancing at his face. "I do not know him." Then again, with an oath. Then a third time, invoking a curse on himself (Matthew 26:72-74). Two questions: why does the man who attacked an armed detachment fold before a girl at a fire? And what do you notice about the escalation from first denial to third?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

He folds because this is the test he never rehearsed and because everything that made the sword possible (adrenaline, momentum, the Master standing beside him) is gone; what is left is a cold, exhausted, isolated man ambushed by a casual question, and sincerity without prayer has exactly that much endurance. The escalation is the second lesson: sin compounds. The first denial is a reflex; the second must shout down the first with an oath; the third spends a self-curse he could not have imagined an hour earlier. Each lie makes the next one cheaper, because each one deepens the identity being protected: by the third, Peter is no longer hiding a fact, he is defending a self he has invented at the fire. This is how ordinary people arrive at words and acts they would have sworn, sincerely, they were incapable of. Nobody should leave tonight feeling superior to Peter; the honest response is recognition.

5. Here is the strangest mercy in this story: Jesus predicted all of it, hours earlier, with a prophecy attached: "You will all fall away... for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee" (Matthew 26:31-32). He was quoting a specific oracle.

Live discovery: say: "Read Zechariah 13:7-9 in pairs. Find the line Jesus quoted, and then read what the oracle says happens AFTER the striking and the scattering. What is inside this prophecy besides the fall?" Let pairs report before the answer box.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The pairs should find that the scattering is not the oracle's last word. Immediately after the shepherd is struck and the sheep scattered: "I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as

one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The LORD is my God'" (Zechariah 13:9). The fall was foretold inside a promise: the fire is a refiner's fire, the ordeal has a purpose and a boundary, and reunion is written into the same sentence as the scattering. And Jesus added His own appointment to it before anyone fell: "I will go before you to Galilee." Mercy scheduled the reunion in advance. The group should feel the size of this: Peter's worst night was never outside the plan, never beyond the prayer of Luke 22:32, and never the end of his story. Neither is anyone's at this table.

6. The cock crows. "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter" (Luke 22:61), a detail only Luke preserves. No word is spoken; Jesus is on trial a courtyard away, and their eyes meet over the fire. Peter remembers, goes out, and weeps bitterly. Sit with the look before you analyze it: what kind of look do you think it was? What kinds of look could it NOT have been, given everything this study has shown us about Jesus and this man?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Let the group offer answers slowly; do not rush past the silence this question creates. What it could not have been: surprise (He predicted this, to the hour and the rooster); contempt or dismissal (He had just prayed for this exact man's faith not to fail, and attached a Galilee appointment to the prophecy of the fall). What Luke shows is a look that carries the memory of a word ("Peter remembered the word of the Lord"): the look reminds him of everything, the warning and the intercession together, and it is the look, not the rooster alone, that breaks him. The Catechism, remarkably, has made its judgment about that look part of catechesis itself: it calls it Jesus' look of infinite mercy, and says it drew tears of repentance (CCC 1429). Being truly seen in our sin by the One we wounded is the most dreaded moment in the world, and the Gospel's claim is that His seeing is mercy: it breaks the heart open, not apart. Then read verse 62 once more, "And he went out and wept bitterly," and ask the closing question below.

7. Last question, and we will deliberately not answer it tonight. Somewhere in this same city, on this same night, another disciple has also betrayed Jesus, and he too will be filled with remorse. Two men, two betrayals, two floods of grief. Is all weeping the same? What makes the difference between grief that saves and grief that destroys? Hold your answer. Next session is entirely about it.

Do not open an answer box for this question. Let it hang. Close the Build section by having the room recall, together and aloud, the verse they memorized last week: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:32). That verse is the floor under tonight. End there.

DIG DEEPER: THE ROOSTER

Roman soldiers named the third watch of the night (roughly midnight to 3 a.m.) *gallicinium*, cockcrow. Jesus' prediction was not vague: before the night's clock struck its own name, the boast would be broken. The Gospels' honesty here is itself evidence: the early Church, in which Peter was

the chief shepherd, preserved and preached the unvarnished story of his worst hour in all four Gospels. A community inventing a legend flatters its founder; a community telling the truth about mercy needs his fall on the record.

DIG DEEPER: WHERE WAS THE LOOK POSSIBLE?

Luke's detail requires geography: Jesus, under guard in the high priest's house, could see the courtyard.

Ancient tradition places the house of Caiaphas on Jerusalem's western hill, and the church of St. Peter in Gallicantu ("at the cockcrow") marks one traditional site today, built above ancient rock-cut chambers. Wherever the exact spot, Luke's detail requires exactly this kind of setting, and pilgrims still stand there imagining the fire, and a Lord on trial turning His head.

SEND: TAKING IT WITH YOU

S1. Where are you following at a distance right now: connected to Christ but managing your exposure, editing yourself in certain rooms or around certain people? Name the courtyard.

S2. What is your fire: the comfort, company, or habit that quietly recalibrates what you are willing to say and be when the question comes? What would it cost to warm yourself somewhere else?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Guard the garden: pray for ten minutes every day this week BEFORE the day's tests, asking specifically, "Lord, show me the test I am not rehearsing for."
2. Once this week, close the distance on purpose: one act that identifies you with Christ in a room where you usually stay anonymous. It can be small; it cannot be invisible.
3. Pray with Psalm 51 once, slowly. If your own courtyard memory surfaces, do not argue with it and do not wallow in it; hold it before God with tonight's promise: the fire in the prophecy is a refiner's fire. Bring yourself back next week; the story is not over.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you were struck, and we scattered; you were faithful, and we warmed ourselves at other fires. We do not hide tonight from what we have denied by our words and our silences. Turn and look at us, and let your look do what it did in the courtyard: break our hearts open toward you and not apart

from you. You have prayed for us that our faith may not fail. We are holding onto that prayer in the dark, until morning. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou

wilt not despise."

Psalm 51:17 (RSV2CE)

Before you dismiss: hand out Take-Home 7 quietly. Standing reminder about the sealed Session 1 sheet. Tell the group plainly: "Next week we find out what happened to two men who betrayed Him and wept. Do not miss it."

PART THREE: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

EVERY PASSAGE IN THIS SESSION

Primary Texts

- Luke 22:54-62, the distance, the fire, the three denials, the look, the weeping
- John 18:15-18, 25-27, the charcoal fire (anthrakia), the gate, the third denial

Live Discovery Text

- Zechariah 13:7-9, strike the shepherd; the refiner's fire; "they will call on my name"

Supporting Texts

- Matthew 26:31-32, Jesus quotes Zechariah and adds the Galilee appointment
- Luke 22:45-46, sleeping in Gethsemane: watch and pray
- John 18:10, Peter's sword
- Matthew 26:69-75, the escalation: oath, then curse
- Luke 22:31-32, the intercession (memorized last session; recalled aloud tonight)

Way of Salvation Strand (leader only)

- 1 Corinthians 10:12, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall
- Proverbs 16:18, pride goes before destruction

Catechism

- CCC 1429, the look of infinite mercy and the tears of repentance

- CCC 1851, our sins present in the Passion, Peter's denial named
- CCC 1451, contrition

Memory Verse

- Psalm 51:17