

Session 7: When the Wall Rebuilds

Romans 7:14-25 · Luke 22:31-34 · John 21:9-19

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the Catholic theology of the fall-after-freedom: the difference between a fall and a surrender, why the enemy's most dangerous weapon is deployed after the sin rather than before it, and how Peter's sifting and restoration form the Church's primary scriptural pattern for getting up. The righteous man falls seven times, and rises.

Catholic Touchstone. Baptism did not abolish the frailty of nature or concupiscence (CCC 1426): the Church expects the long war. Despair and presumption as the two thefts of hope (CCC 2091-2092).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Schedule truth: someone in your room fell this week, possibly the week after their best confession in years, and tonight exists for them. A study on strongholds that did not plan an evening for relapse would be lying about the terrain. The Church does not lie about it: "the new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls concupiscence" (CCC 1426, closing the loop to Session 2). Grace is real, and the war is long: the Church holds both without blinking, and so will you tonight.

Romans 7 is the night's honesty charter: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Scholars debate exactly whose voice Paul performs here (his pre-Christian self, Adam, the Christian mid-battle), and you need not settle it: what matters pastorally is that Scripture contains this cry, that the apostle can write it without despair, and that its answer arrives not as analysis but as a name: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!", after which the verse's last line restates the conflict, and Romans 8 unfolds the deliverance. The cry and the thanksgiving belong to the same paragraph. Anyone who has rebuilt a wall they hated knows why.

The night's center is Peter, in two scenes that must be read together. First Luke 22:31-34: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." Every clause is doctrine. The enemy must ask (the leash, Session 3). Jesus does not promise Peter will not fall; he prays that his faith will not fail: a fall and a failure of faith are different things. And the restoration is planned before the fall occurs: "when you have turned again" (not if), with a job attached. Then John 21, read from verse 9 so the group catches the detail: a charcoal fire (John 21:9), the same rare word John used for the fire of the denial courtyard (John 18:18); the threefold "do you love me," which the Church has long seen as healing the threefold denial; and a commission with each answer: feed, tend, feed. Christ does not put Peter on probation; he confirms and entrusts to him his pastoral office.

Name the enemy's two-stroke engine explicitly, because once seen it cannot be unseen: before the sin, the voice whispers "it is no big deal; you can handle it; just once"; after the sin, the same voice, same speaker, whispers "it is unforgivable; you are hopeless; there is no point now." Minimize, then

annihilate. The switch is his tell (the group met it in Session 5's Thread Watch; tonight it is taught aloud). Both whispers serve one goal: keep you from the means of grace: the first by making them unnecessary, the second by making them unthinkable. The Catholic answer to a fall is therefore brutally simple and utterly unglamorous: get up fast. Contrition now, Confession soon (mortal sin, or what may be, goes to the sacrament: the full mortal/venial teaching lives in our study Hold Fast and in CCC 1854-1864 and 1456-1458; cross-reference, do not re-teach), and back to the front. Speed is the whole tactic: the wall's rebuilding crew works only in the dark hours between the fall and the return.

Guard the two ditches by name (CCC 2091-2092): despair, which decides God's mercy has a floor and I am beneath it; and presumption, which schedules tomorrow's absolution during tonight's sin. Both are thefts of hope; both are answered by the same fact: mercy is not a mood God is in but the covenant he keeps, and its price was already paid in full on a Friday you did not attend. Hope, in the Catholic grammar, rests on Christ's fidelity, not on your streak.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Proverbs 24:16. "For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity." In context the falling is above all adversity; the tradition's pastoral appropriation extends it to moral falls. Either way, what the verse refuses is the equation of falling with wickedness: the righteous are marked by the rising. Central discovery; do not name it in advance.

Micah 7:8. The taunt-answer of the fallen believer, and the study's memory verse tonight: "Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me." In its own setting this is Zion's voice under judgment, defying her enemy; the Church's appropriation hands the fallen believer the same words of hope in God's restoring light. Second discovery.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Catherine of Siena

The Dialogue

St. Catherine records, in substance, the Father teaching her that he sometimes permits his servants to be beset by weakness and temptation, not because he delights in their humiliation but because self-knowledge is the soil of humility, and humility the soil of every virtue. What is permitted, he teaches her, is permitted for love, and measured, and ordered to mercy.

For our purposes: a fall, taken to God, becomes intelligence: it maps your poverty precisely, and poverty known is the ground grace builds on. The enemy wants your fall to teach you despair; the Father intends it to teach you where to stop trusting yourself.

Presented as a summary of a constant theme of the Dialogue; not a direct quotation.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Francis de Sales

Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III, ch. 9 (On Gentleness toward Ourselves)

St. Francis (whom we met on temptation in Session 3) teaches, in substance, that when we fall we must correct ourselves gently and calmly, not with stormy self-reproach: the heart that rages at its own fault adds a second fault to the first and exhausts in fury the strength repentance needed. Lift the fallen heart quietly, he counsels: repent with a repentance that is firm and peaceful, and begin again at once, without waiting to feel worthy of beginning.

For our purposes: the violent self-hatred that follows a fall wears the costume of contrition, but listen to its accent: it is the annihilating whisper, not the Father's voice. Real contrition is grieved and calm and moves toward the confessional; rage at self just circles the crater. Gentleness is not softness on sin; it is good stewardship of the strength you need to rise.

Presented as a summary of his teaching in Part III; not a direct quotation.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Faustina Kowalska

Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul (approved private revelation)

St. Faustina records our Lord teaching, in substance, that the greater the misery of a soul, the greater its claim on his mercy; that his Passion was suffered precisely for sinners; and that what grieves him is less the magnitude of the sin brought to him than the smallness of the trust with which souls approach. The Divine Mercy devotion the Church drew from her Diary exists, in large part, for exactly the hour this session addresses: the hour after the fall.

For our purposes: the enemy's post-fall arithmetic says your sin has outgrown the mercy. Divine Mercy's arithmetic runs the other way, and the Church canonized the messenger. "Jesus, I trust in you" is a complete act of resistance, five words long, available in the crater.

Presented as a summary of the Diary's central themes. An approved private revelation: judged free of anything contrary to faith and morals and open to prudent acceptance; binding on no one. Not a verbatim quotation.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1426.** Conversion to Christ and Baptism have not abolished nature's frailty and weakness, nor the inclination to sin called concupiscence, which remains in the baptized "such that with the help of the grace of Christ" they may prove themselves in the struggle. The Church planned for your long war; relapse does not surprise her.
- **CCC 2091.** Despair: man ceases to hope for his salvation from God or for forgiveness of sins: contrary to God's goodness, his justice, and his mercy. The first ditch.
- **CCC 2092.** Presumption: either counting on one's own capacities without grace, or counting on God's mercy without conversion. The second ditch: and note it condemns tonight's subtler temptation, scheduling tomorrow's absolution during tonight's sin.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

THE LIAR'S VOICE (climaxes tonight; named and answered next week). Tonight teaches the voice's two-stroke engine (minimize before, annihilate after) and hands the group Micah's script for talking back. This is the thread's penultimate beat: next session the liar is named from John 8:44 and answered for good by the truth that frees. If someone anticipates it, rejoice and hold one week.

THE WALL (aftermath continues). Some sealed sheets were torn up in hope; some falls since Session 5 will make participants feel the tearing was premature. Tonight's whole content answers that feeling: the sheet marked a declaration of war, not a victory parade, and wars include bad days. Never ask; just teach.

HOUSEKEEPING FOR NEXT WEEK: Session 8 closes the study with commissioning. If your parish can manage any small send-forth touch (a blessing from Father, a candle, printed commissioning cards from Take-Home 8), arrange it this week.

SESSION GOALS

1. Normalize the terrain without normalizing surrender: CCC 1426, Romans 7, and the long war the Church expects.
2. Read Peter's sifting and restoration as the Church's primary scriptural pattern: fall foreseen, faith prayed for, restoration prepared, office confirmed.
3. Expose the enemy's two-stroke engine: minimize before, annihilate after: and its single goal of blocking the means of grace.
4. Teach the tactic: get up fast: contrition now, Confession soon (Hold Fast carries the full mortal/venial teaching), back to the front.
5. Name the two ditches: despair and presumption: and ground hope in Christ's fidelity, not the streak.
6. Deliver Proverbs 24:16 and Micah 7:8 by discovery: the rising righteous, and the script against the gloater.

TIMED PLAN (90 MINUTES)

- Welcome, covenant, opening prayer: 8 min
- Win questions: 10 min
- Build: Romans 7:14-25, the honesty charter: 15 min
- Build: Luke 22:31-34 and John 21:9-19, the Peter pattern: 22 min
- Discoveries (Proverbs 24:16; Micah 7:8) and the steelman: 20 min
- Send, Live It, closing: 15 min

If time runs short: cut the Dig Deeper box and one Win question. Do not cut the two-stroke-engine teaching or St. Francis de Sales's gentleness; between them they defuse the two bombs a relapse plants.

PASTORAL NOTE FOR THE LEADER (STANDING NOTE, WITH TONIGHT'S ADDITIONS)

No one is ever asked to name their battle or their falls. Tonight of all nights, watch your pronouns: teach in "we," never in "some of you." Where a stronghold involves addiction, compulsion, or harm to self or others, repeat warmly that relapse in recovery is met with the same allies: Confession, spiritual direction, professional and group support: and that a lapse is a medical and spiritual event to bring into the light quickly, not proof that help failed. If anyone's discouragement tonight sounds like hopelessness about life itself and not only about a habit, take it seriously, stay with them afterward, and connect them promptly with your pastor and appropriate care; that moment outranks every plan in this guide.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, you told Simon the truth before he fell, and you had already prayed for him.
You know the week each of us has actually had: not the one we would report, the one you watched.
Tonight, meet everyone in this room exactly at their true coordinates:
the standing, that they may take heed; the fallen, that they may rise.
You who restored Peter beside a charcoal fire, restore us. Amen.*

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What did you learn to do (skating, guitar, a language, a trade) where falling or failing was simply part of the curriculum? How did your teacher treat the falls?
2. Why might a setback late in a struggle feel more discouraging than the same setback early, even when real ground has been won? Has that been true for you?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

Read Romans 7:14-25 aloud.

3. Be honest: does anything in this passage sound familiar? What is startling about finding these sentences in the Bible, in an apostle's letter, and where does the paragraph land?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Scripture contains, in the first person, the exact cry of everyone who has rebuilt a wall they hated. Whatever voice Paul is performing here (scholars discuss it; we need not settle it), the pastoral fact stands: the Word of God makes room for this experience without flinching and without despair. And watch the paragraph's turn: not analysis, not a plan, but a name: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (The verse's final line then restates the conflict; the deliverance unfolds in Romans 8.) The cry and the thanksgiving share a paragraph. Tonight is about learning to keep them in the same paragraph of our own lives: with the shortest possible gap between them.

Read Luke 22:31-34 aloud.

4. Read Jesus's words to Simon clause by clause: the demand, the prayer, the "when." What does each clause teach about falls: before they happen?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat": the demand is plural (all of them), the prayer that follows is for Peter by name. The enemy must ask; the leash from Session 3 holds even here. And, an inference the wider Scriptures earn (trials as testing unto keeping): what he intends for destruction, God permits for purification: wheat is sifted to be kept. "But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail": Jesus does not pray that Peter will not fall: he knows he will,

and says so: he prays that the fall will not become a failure of faith. A fall and a shipwreck are different events. “And when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren”: when, not if. The restoration is planned before the denial occurs, and it comes with a job. Before Peter has sinned, his repentance already has an assignment.

Say it plainly for the room: if you fell this week, you fell in front of Someone who was not surprised, and who lives right now to make intercession for you (Hebrews 7:25). What Luke shows him doing for Simon by name, Hebrews promises in kind for every one of his own.

Read John 21:9-19 aloud.

5. John notes it was a charcoal fire (21:9): the same rare detail he recorded in the courtyard of the denial (18:18). Walk through what Jesus does and does not do beside this fire. What is the shape of a Christ-run restoration?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

No interrogation of the past: Jesus never says “why did you do it” or replays the courtyard. Instead, beside the same kind of fire, one question three times: “do you love me?”: the Church has long seen one healing for each denial, painful precisely where the wound was, and no deeper. And to each answer, a commission: “Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep.” Peter is not put on probation, or sent to the back row; his pastoral office is confirmed and entrusted to him. Then two words that reset everything to the beginning: “Follow me”: the same call as the first day by the same lake.

The office and the flock are Peter’s alone; the shape is for everyone: love asked for, not performance; the wound addressed, not archived; the call resumed (“Follow me”); mission restored. The confessional works on that shape: absolution really given, and the penance the confessor assigns is medicine for healing (CCC 1459-1460), never probation withholding pardon. The enemy’s restoration plan for you is a lifetime of probation; Christ’s is a fire, a question, and the road back.

DISCOVERY MOMENT (TWO FINDS)

First: say: somewhere in Proverbs there is a verse that defines the righteous man by an activity you would never guess: and the number seven is involved. Send them hunting (Proverbs 24:16). Read it: “a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again.” Ask: according to this verse, what distinguishes the righteous man? Not the not-falling. The rising. Seven, the number of completeness: a whole career of being brought low, and the verse still calls him righteous. (In context the falls are above all adversity; the tradition extends the comfort, rightly, to the moral battlefield.) The righteous man is defined by his direction, not his stumbles.

Second: say: one of the minor prophets wrote a script: words addressed directly to the enemy gloating over a fallen believer. It is the boldest talk-back in the Old Testament. Send them to Micah 7 (verse 8). Read it aloud, together, and mean it: “Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me.” Tell the group: memorize this. It is tonight’s memory verse, and it is ammunition for the exact hour the enemy thinks he owns.

6. Compare the enemy’s whisper before a sin with his whisper after it. What is each designed to do, and what does the switch itself reveal? (After they name it, you may give it the study’s label: a two-stroke engine.)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Before: “It is no big deal. You can handle it. Just once. You deserve it.” After: “It is unforgivable. You are hopeless. You will never change. There is no point going back now.” Minimize, then annihilate: a two-stroke engine, and both strokes serve one goal: keep you from the means of grace: the first by making them unnecessary, the second by making them unthinkable.

The switch is his tell. Truth does not flip its assessment of the same act by 180 degrees in an hour; a liar tailoring the lie to the moment does. Once you hear the engine, you can name the speaker mid-sentence: which is exactly where this study goes next week. Meanwhile the tactic against both strokes is identical and unglamorous: get up fast. Contrition now, in the crater (“Jesus, I trust in you” is five words and a complete act of resistance); Confession soon: mortal sin, or what may be, goes to the sacrament quickly, and shame does not get to set the schedule; then back to the front. The wall’s rebuilding crew works only in the dark hours between the fall and the return. Deny them the shift.

Build, Then Press: The Assurance Question

BUILD THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

A Reformed friend, meaning comfort, says: “This whole anxious cycle: fall, confess, fall, confess: is what Rome does to people. Jesus said, ‘I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand’ (John 10:28). Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:38-39). A truly saved person is secure forever; and honestly, someone who keeps falling back into the same serious sin should ask whether he was ever really converted: but the true believer should rest in the perseverance of the saints, or as it gets preached, once saved, always saved.”

Feel its pull honestly: it offers exhausted people rest, it exalts grace, and it quotes two of the most beloved promises in Scripture: accurately.

7. Now press, with Peter in the room: set John 10:28 and Romans 8 next to Luke 22, 1 Corinthians 10:12, and the two ditches (CCC 2091-2092). What does Catholic assurance actually rest on, and what does the objection cost the person it means to comfort?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Grant the promises first in their own words, whole: no one shall snatch them out of my hand; nothing in all creation shall separate us from the love of God in Christ. The Church affirms every word as written. The Catholic press is one honest clause the texts do not abolish: the hand does not imprison. Nothing can snatch me; I remain free to walk, and Scripture warns the standing exactly there: “let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12); “you have fallen away from grace” (Galatians 5:4, to baptized believers); “provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off” (Romans 11:22). Warnings are meaningless noise if falling from grace is impossible: that, not the security of God’s grip, is the real dividing line the Council of Trent drew.

Now count the cost of the objection’s comfort. Its rest comes with a hidden blade: “if you keep falling, maybe you were never saved”: which hands the relapsed believer precisely the annihilating whisper of tonight’s two-stroke engine, now wearing doctrinal vestments. And be fair to the best

Reformed reading: it too holds Peter up as a true believer preserved through his fall and restored: on that much we agree, gladly. Peter is everyone's pattern: really called, really warned, really fallen, really restored: his faith held (Christ prayed) while his footing failed. Catholic assurance therefore rests where Peter's did: not on a past moment's transaction, nor on my streak, but on the present fidelity of Christ: who has prayed for me, stocked his Church with mercy on tap, and made returning the most ordinary act in Catholic life. Between despair ("I am beyond mercy") and presumption ("mercy is automatic, sin on"), hope walks the ridge: sure of God, unassuming about self, and never more than one good confession from home.

DIG DEEPER (IF TIME ALLOWS)

Luke 15:17-24: the prodigal rehearses "treat me as one of your hired servants," but when he speaks to his father, he never repeats the hired-servant line, and the restoration (robe, ring, shoes, feast) outruns the rehearsed request. Notice what the father's welcome makes unnecessary to say.

Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Revelation 12:10 proclaims the accuser cast down and defeated in Christ. The Spirit's real conviction, and the Church's real warnings about grave sin, still stand and lead home; what is contraband is the hopeless condemnation that blocks the road back.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT

8. Which stroke of the engine is louder in your ear: the minimizing before, or the annihilating after? What would it change to answer that exact whisper with Micah 7:8, by name, out loud?

9. Peter's restoration came with an assignment: "strengthen your brethren." Who might your falls: survived, confessed, and risen from: one day qualify you to strengthen?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- **Memorize the script.** Micah 7:8, cold, by Wednesday. Say it aloud once each night as an act of faith before God, whether or not you fell that day: not a conversation with the enemy, but a rehearsal of hope until it becomes reflex.
- **Shrink the gap.** Decide now, in peacetime: if I fall, my first move, promptly, is "Jesus, I trust in you," and my next move is Confession at the earliest reasonable opportunity (before Communion, if the sin was mortal). Write both somewhere you will find them in the dark.
- **Gentleness drill.** Once this week, when you catch the self-savaging voice after any fault (large or small), stop mid-sentence and correct yourself the de Sales way: firmly, calmly, and moving toward the remedy: no raging at the crater.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you prayed for Simon before the rooster and the fire, and your prayer held when his courage did not.

*Pray so for each of us: that our faith may not fail in the falling,
and that our rising may be fast, and gentle, and toward the confessional, and back to the front.
"Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise." Amen.*

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

“Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me.”

Micah 7:8

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 7, in order:

1. Romans 7:14-25 (main reading: the honesty charter)
2. Luke 22:31-34 (main reading: the sifting, the prayer, the “when”)
3. John 21:9-19 with John 18:18 (main reading: the charcoal fire of 21:9 answering the denial fire of 18:18; office confirmed)
4. Proverbs 24:16 (Discovery 1: the righteous man rises)
5. Micah 7:8 (Discovery 2 and memory verse: the script against the gloater)
6. John 10:28; Romans 8:38-39 (steelman: the promises, affirmed)
7. 1 Corinthians 10:12 (steelman answer: take heed lest you fall)
8. Luke 15:17-24; Romans 8:1; Revelation 12:10 (Dig Deeper: the running father; no condemnation)
9. For mortal/venial sin in full: see the Catholic Armory study Hold Fast, with CCC 1854-1864 and 1456-1458