

CATHOLIC ARMORY

The Stronger One

Tearing Down Strongholds and Walking Free

*“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace;
but when one stronger than he assails him and overcomes him, he takes away his
armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoil.”*

Luke 11:21-22

An eight-session study for those in the fight
Leader Guide

About This Study

A stronghold is a lie fortified into habit until it feels like home: and every parish is full of people quietly living inside one. This study is for them, which is to say, for all of us: the habitual sin that will not die, the resentment with a lease, the compulsion, the despairing self-talk, the wall. Across eight sessions the group learns what strongholds are and how they are built, meets the enemy soberly and without fear, takes up the armor of God, and brings the fight to the weapons with divine power: Confession, the Eucharist, the renounced lie, the renewed mind: before learning how to rise after a fall and what freedom is finally for.

A word about the word. “Stronghold” is this study’s pastoral working metaphor, built from Paul’s fortress image in 2 Corinthians 10, for entrenched patterns of falsehood and sin. It is not a clinical diagnosis, and it is not a claim of demonic possession. The study deliberately keeps four things distinct while tracing Christ’s authority over all of them: ordinary temptation, which everyone faces; vice, the habit sin carves; addiction and illness, which call for good treatment as grace’s ally; and extraordinary demonic affliction, which is rare and belongs to the Church’s ordered ministry (Session 3, and the note at the Gerasene in Session 8). Leaders should keep those lanes marked whenever the metaphor is working hard.

Format. Each session runs about 90 minutes and its guide has three parts: a Leader Preparation Guide (read during the week: overview, background, the session’s Voices of the Church, Catechism connections, thread notes, goals, timed plan), a Discussion Guide (used live: opening prayer, Win warm-up questions, Build questions with boxed answers to share after discussion, Discovery Moments where the group finds key passages themselves, a built-then-pressed objection, Send questions, Live It This Week, closing prayer, memory verse), and a one-page Leader Reference Card of every passage in order. A two-page Take-Home sheet for participants accompanies each session. Scripture quotations follow the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition (RSV2CE); Catechism references are cited by paragraph.

The Wall. At Session 1, each participant privately writes, in one sentence, the wall they most want down, then seals the sheet with their own name on the outside. It is never shared, never collected, never discussed. At Session 5 each person opens it alone, in silence, before the Lord, renounces the lie beneath it, and is warmly pointed toward Confession. Leaders: guard this mechanic’s privacy absolutely; it is the pastoral spine of the study.

The threads. Three arcs run the length of the study and resolve on schedule: the liar’s voice (planted Session 1, named and answered Session 8), the armor he trusted (planted Session 1, resolved Session 4), and the swept house (planted Session 1, resolved Sessions 5-6). Thread Watch boxes in each Leader Preparation Guide keep you oriented.

Pastoral guardrails. No participant is ever asked to name their battle. Confidentiality is stated aloud at Session 1 and renewed as needed, always with its one honest exception: if someone’s safety is at risk (harm to self or others, or abuse of the vulnerable), the leader will lovingly involve the help that situation requires. Where strongholds involve addiction, compulsion, or harm to self or others, the study consistently walks people toward Confession, spiritual direction, and appropriate professional help as allies. On the enemy: the study teaches the baptized to resist and renounce, never to converse with or command evil spirits; solemn exorcism belongs to a priest with his bishop’s mandate (CCC 1673), and Session 3 teaches the full guardrail. For the complete doctrine of mortal and venial sin, this study cross-references the Catholic Armory study Hold Fast rather than re-teaching it.

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COMPANION VOLUME

The eight two-page participant Take-Home sheets are collected separately as The Stronger One: Take-Homes, for duplex printing and weekly distribution. Take-Home 1 carries the sealed Wall sheet; Take-Home 8 carries the Commissioning Card.

Session 1: The Strong Man's House

Luke 11:14-26 · 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers what a stronghold actually is (a lie defended so long it feels like a load-bearing wall) and, more importantly, who Christ is in the fight: the Stronger One who has already broken into the strong man's house. The session ends with the fight reframed: we are not storming a fortress alone; we are joining a victory already won.

Catholic Touchstone. Christ's definitive victory over the "prince of this world" (CCC 2853) and the baptized Christian's dignity (CCC 1691). The whole of human history is caught up in a hard combat with the powers of darkness (CCC 409, citing *Gaudium et Spes* 37): the decisive engagement was won at the cross once for all, and its fruits are received, defended, and lived until he comes.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This session opens a study for people in the middle of a real fight. Assume the room quietly contains battles with pornography, drink, rage, resentment, food, self-hatred, gossip, spending, despair. You will never ask anyone to name their battle, tonight or ever. Say that out loud in the first ten minutes; it changes what people are willing to receive.

The main text is Luke 11:14-26. Jesus has just cast out a demon that kept a man mute, and the crowd splits: some marvel, some accuse him of working by *Beelzebul*, the prince of demons. Jesus answers with iron logic (a kingdom divided against itself falls; Satan does not sabotage Satan) and then makes the claim that gives our study its name: "when one stronger than he assails him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoil" (Luke 11:22). The exorcism the crowd just watched is not a magic trick; it is evidence that the Stronger One has entered the strong man's house and started carrying people out.

Notice the phrase "finger of God" (Luke 11:20). Jesus's phrase strongly recalls Egypt. When the magicians of Pharaoh could not reproduce the plague of gnats, they told Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19). Luke invites us to hear the Exodus underneath the exorcism: the same God who broke Pharaoh's grip on Israel is now breaking the enemy's grip on persons. Deliverance from slavery is not a New Testament novelty; it is God's signature.

The second text, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, gives the study its key word. Paul says our weapons "have divine power to destroy strongholds." The Greek word is *ochyroma*, a military fortress. Then Paul names his targets: "arguments," "every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God," "every thought." The walls, whatever else they are, are made of thoughts. Paul's own campaign is apostolic, against arguments raised against the knowledge of God; this study takes his fortress image as its working picture for something pastoral: a lie (about God, about yourself, about what will make you happy) defended, supplied, and lived in for so long that it feels structural. That is why willpower alone so rarely takes one down: you cannot punch a thought. It has to be besieged with truth and grace.

Do not skip Luke 11:24-26, the unclean spirit returning to the house he left. Luke says he finds it “swept and put in order”; Matthew’s parallel adds the third word, “empty” (Matthew 12:44), and tonight reads the two together. This is the most pastorally urgent paragraph of the night for anyone who has quit a sin before and relapsed worse. Jesus’s warning is that emptiness is not freedom. A vacated house is an advertisement. The goal of this whole study is not a swept house; it is an occupied one, and Sessions 5 and 6 will spend two full evenings on how the Stronger One takes up residence. Tonight, just plant the question.

One caution on tone: this session talks about the devil, and Session 3 will talk about him at length. Keep the center of gravity on Christ. The study is named for him, not for the enemy. If the room gets fascinated or frightened, steer back to Luke 11:22: the strong man’s armor is already taken.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Isaiah 49:24-25. “Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued?” Isaiah asks the question every addict and every habitual sinner asks in the dark: can someone actually get free from a captor this strong? God answers: “Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you.” Read canonically, Jesus’s strong-man parable embodies the pattern this oracle promises. The group will find this passage themselves in Discovery Moment 2; do not name it in advance.

Exodus 8:19. “The finger of God.” Pharaoh’s own magicians concede that a power beyond every human and occult art has entered the contest. When Jesus takes up the phrase, he frames his exorcisms as a new Exodus: God against the slave-master, and the slave-master losing. The group finds this in Discovery Moment 1.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine of Hippo

Confessions, Book VIII, ch. 5 (§§10-12)

Looking back on the years he could not break with sin, St. Augustine describes, in substance, how his chain was forged: a will bent the wrong way produced disordered desire; desire indulged became habit; and habit unresisted hardened into something that felt like necessity. He calls it a chain of his own making, link by link, holding him bound not by someone else’s iron but by his own will.

For our purposes: the greatest analyst of strongholds in Christian history is a man who lived inside one. He did not get out by trying harder. He got out when grace made the old lie (“you cannot live without this”) sound, at last, like a lie.

Presented as a close summary of Confessions VIII.5.10-12; the chain imagery is Augustine’s own, wording varies by translation.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Leo the Great

Sermon 21, On the Nativity (quoted in CCC 1691)

“Christian, recognize your dignity and, now that you share in God’s own nature, do not return to your former base condition by sinning. Remember who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light.”

For our purposes: St. Leo's logic is the logic of this study. He does not say "become someone new by fighting harder." He says "remember what you already are." The baptized person fighting a stronghold is not a slave hoping for rescue; he is a rescued man clearing enemy holdouts from liberated territory. And where grave sin has handed ground back, the same Lord who rescued restores: that is Session 5.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Athanasius (the witness of St. Antony of the Desert)

Life of Antony (drawing together several of Antony's discourses on the demons)

St. Athanasius records the desert father St. Antony teaching his monks, in substance, that since the coming of the Lord the enemy is a defeated foe: the demons can threaten, harass, and terrify, but their real power is broken, and they trade on fear precisely because fear is most of what they have left. A steady heart, the sign of the cross, and confidence in Christ scatter what noise and spectacle cannot survive.

For our purposes: one of the Church's great witnesses to spiritual combat insisted the enemy fights from weakness, not strength. As we might put it: the strong man rattles the bars of a cage that is already locked.

Presented as a summary combining several passages of Antony's teaching as recorded by St. Athanasius; not a direct quotation.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 409.** The whole of human history has been marked by a hard combat with the powers of darkness, a battle running from the origin of the world to the last day (summarizing CCC 409, which cites *Gaudium et Spes* 37). The martial imagery names a real conflict. Naming the war is not drama; it is realism.
- **CCC 2853.** Victory over the "prince of this world" was won once for all at the Hour when Jesus freely gave himself up to death to give us his life. The decisive battle was fought on Good Friday, before you were born; what remains is to receive, defend, and live its victory in your own fight.
- **CCC 1691.** St. Leo's "recognize your dignity," placed by the Church at the head of her whole treatment of life in Christ: moral struggle begins from identity, not toward it.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

THE LIAR'S VOICE (planted tonight, resolves Session 8). Tonight's definition (the walls are made of thoughts) invites the question you will ask in the Send section: many walls are braced by a ruling sentence, heard from someone or rehearsed to oneself. Do not resolve where the sentence came from or how it is silenced; that arc runs the whole study and lands on the truth that sets free.

THE ARMOR HE TRUSTED (planted tonight, resolves Session 4). Luke 11:22 says the Stronger One "takes away his armor in which he trusted." Let the phrase hang tonight. In Session 4 the group will reach the study's synthesis (ours, not a claim any single verse makes alone): the enemy's trusted armor is best read as the lie, stripped at the cross, while God issues armor of his own to us (Ephesians 6; leader-prep cross-reference).

THE SWEPT HOUSE (planted tonight, resolves Sessions 5-6). "Swept and put in order" (Luke), with Matthew's added word "empty" (12:44), is the study's standing warning against negative-only

freedom. It will be answered by the sacraments (Session 5) and the renewed mind and opposing virtues (Session 6).

THE WALL (private sealed sheet, distributed tonight with Take-Home 1, opened privately at Session 5). Unlike other studies' sealed guesses, this one is never shared, never collected, never discussed aloud. Say so twice when you hand it out.

SESSION GOALS

1. Establish the covenant of the room: confidentiality, no forced sharing, no one ever asked to name their battle.
2. Define a stronghold from 2 Corinthians 10:3-5: a lie fortified into habit until it feels structural.
3. Read the strong-man parable so the group sees Jesus's exorcisms (and our fight) as the Stronger One plundering a house he has already entered.
4. Recover the Exodus frame: deliverance from slavery is God's signature act (Exodus 8:19; Isaiah 49:24-25).
5. Sound the swept-house warning: freedom is occupancy, not vacancy.
6. Distribute the sealed sheet ("The Wall") with its privacy promise intact.

TIMED PLAN (90 MINUTES)

- Welcome, covenant of the room, opening prayer: 10 min
- Win questions: 10 min
- Build: Luke 11:14-23 with Discovery Moments 1 and 2: 25 min
- Build: 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, defining the stronghold: 15 min
- Build: the swept house and the steelman chain: 15 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, sealed sheet, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short: cut the Dig Deeper box and reduce Win to the second question only. Do not cut the covenant of the room or the sealed-sheet instructions; those two carry the pastoral weight of the whole study.

PASTORAL NOTE FOR THE LEADER (STANDING NOTE, EVERY SESSION)

This study assumes some participants are personally battling a stronghold right now. Three standing rules: (1) No one is ever asked, invited, or pressured to name their battle; sharing questions always offer a general or hypothetical register. (2) State the confidentiality covenant aloud at Session 1 and whenever a new person joins: what is spoken in the room stays in the room, with one exception stated plainly up front: if someone's safety is at risk (harm to self or others, or abuse of the vulnerable), the leader will lovingly involve the help that situation requires. (3) Where a stronghold involves addiction, compulsion, or harm to self or others, your role is to walk the person warmly toward Confession, a spiritual director or pastor, and appropriate professional help (a doctor, a counselor, a recovery group). Grace and good medicine are allies, not rivals; the Church herself insists on that. You are a brother or sister in arms, not a clinician or an exorcist.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Stronger One, you entered the strong man's house and you were not afraid.

We come tonight with walls we did not plan to build and cannot pull down alone.

You see every one of them, and you are not ashamed of us.

Open the Scriptures to us, open our hearts to you, and begin, tonight, whatever demolition you intend.

We ask this in your holy name, the name every other power obeys. Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Think of a place where you have felt completely safe: a grandparent's kitchen, a childhood fort, a certain pew. What made it feel that way?
2. When you hear the word "stronghold," what picture comes to mind first: something protecting you, or something imprisoning you? Can one building be both?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

Read Luke 11:14-23 aloud.

3. Jesus has just freed a man who could not speak. What accusation do some in the crowd make, and how does Jesus take it apart?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

They say he casts out demons "by Beelzebul, the prince of demons" (v. 15). Jesus answers with the logic of civil war: a kingdom divided against itself falls, and Satan does not sabotage his own operation (vv. 17-18). Then he raises the stakes: "if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (v. 20). The exorcism is not entertainment; it is an announcement. The rightful King has landed.

DISCOVERY MOMENT 1

Ask: "Finger of God" is a strange phrase, and Jesus is quoting somewhere. Where has Scripture used it before? Give the group Bibles and this one clue: Egypt, during the plagues. Let them hunt until someone finds Exodus 8:19, where Pharaoh's magicians admit, "This is the finger of God."

Then ask: why would Jesus want an exorcism to sound like the plagues of Egypt? Draw it out: the Exodus is God breaking a slave-master's grip. the exorcism is framed as a new Exodus; and in this study's image, every stronghold is a little Egypt.

4. Look at the parable in verses 21-22. Who is the strong man? What is his palace? And who is the "one stronger than he"?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The strong man is Satan; the palace with its goods is the territory he holds, including persons he holds captive; the Stronger One is Christ. Notice the tense of the whole scene: Jesus is not promising

to assail the strong man someday. The exorcism the crowd just watched is the plundering in progress. The Stronger One is already inside the house, carrying people out.

And notice what the Stronger One takes first: “his armor in which he trusted.” Keep that phrase; this study will come back for it.

DISCOVERY MOMENT 2

Say: centuries before this, Israel’s prophets asked out loud whether rescue from a captor this strong is even possible, and God answered. Send the group to Isaiah 49 and have them hunt for the question and the answer (they are looking for verses 24-25).

Have someone read verses 24-25 aloud in full from their Bible (abridged here): “Can the prey be taken from the mighty...? Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued, for I will contend with those who contend with you.” Ask: who does the contending in that verse? Land the point gently: the question is not whether you are strong enough. It never was.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 aloud.

5. Paul says our weapons “have divine power to destroy strongholds.” Then he tells us what he is aiming at: “arguments,” “every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God,” “every thought.” What does that tell us the fortress walls are made of?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Thoughts. Paul aims at arguments and thoughts raised against the knowledge of God: whatever else the walls are, they are made of thoughts. In pastoral experience, the load-bearing ones are lies: about God (“he is holding out on you”), about yourself (“this is just who you are”), about happiness (“you cannot live without this”), defended and supplied so long they feel structural. That is why willpower alone so rarely brings one down; you cannot punch a thought. It has to be besieged: starved of supply, answered with truth, and handed over to the divine power Paul is talking about.

Our working definition for the whole study, offered as our pastoral application of Paul’s image rather than as his dictionary entry: a stronghold is a lie fortified into habit until it feels like home.

Read Luke 11:24-26 aloud.

Then read Matthew 12:43-45 aloud (Matthew’s parallel).

6. Luke says the returning spirit finds the house “swept and put in order”; Matthew adds the word “empty.” Things end worse than they began. What is missing from that house? Why is “empty” not the same as “free”?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The house is clean but unoccupied. Nobody moved in. Jesus is warning against negative-only freedom: quitting a sin creates a vacuum, and a vacuum is an advertisement. Anyone who has white-knuckled a habit into remission and relapsed worse knows this paragraph from the inside, and it is in the Bible because Jesus knew it first, without condemnation and without illusion.

The goal of this study is not a swept house. It is an occupied one. How the Stronger One takes up residence is where Sessions 5 and 6 are headed; for now, just hold the warning.

Build, Then Press: The Skeptic's Case

BUILD THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

Someone you love says this, and means it kindly: "Strongholds are just psychology. Neuroscience has mapped the habit loop: cue, routine, reward. Therapy and medication genuinely free people every day. Dressing a dopamine circuit up as a demon is superstition, and it is not harmless: some religious people have used devil-talk to shame the suffering or to talk them out of the treatment that would actually have helped them."

Let the group sit with it. Have them name what is right in it before anyone answers it. (A good deal is right in it.)

7. Now press: what did we just watch Jesus do in Luke 11, and what does the Church actually teach about medicine, psychology, and the enemy? Can both be real?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Grant the truth first: the habit loop is real, therapy and medicine are gifts, and the Church esteems them; her prudent practice ordinarily includes serious medical and psychological evaluation before anything extraordinary is ever concluded. Any spirituality that shames the suffering or blocks treatment is not Catholic.

But Luke 11 will not let us stop there. Jesus heals a real affliction and names a real, personal enemy behind human slavery, and the Church has never demythologized him: Satan is a fallen creature, active, and yet strictly limited, "not infinite" in power (Session 3 will spend a whole evening here). The Catholic answer is both/and: strongholds have an anatomy (habit, wound, chemistry), and there is also a strategist in the field who can exploit any of it. The Church neither diagnoses a demon behind every struggle nor pretends the enemy is fiction: treating the anatomy while denying the war leaves the siege half-understood; blaming a demon while refusing help for the anatomy is presumption. Grace does not compete with good medicine; grace enlists it.

DIG DEEPER (IF TIME ALLOWS)

Colossians 2:15: at the cross God "disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him." A closely related disarming image to Luke 11:22: the armor is already off.

Hebrews 2:14-15: through death Christ destroyed "him who has the power of death, that is, the devil," and delivered "all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage." The mechanism of the victory, stated outright.

1 John 3:8: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." The premise of this whole study, in one sentence.

A modern voice, honestly labeled: the Anglican writer C. S. Lewis observed in the preface to *The Screwtape Letters* that there are two equal and opposite errors about the devils: disbelief in them, and an unhealthy fascination with them. Tonight's steelman is the first error; Session 3 will guard the second.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT

8. Where in your life have you settled for “swept and empty” (a habit merely paused, a vacancy) instead of occupied? You do not need to say it aloud; name it to yourself honestly.

9. Many walls are braced by a ruling sentence: something somebody once said to you, or something you have said to yourself so long it sounds like your own voice. If yours is, this week, without judging it yet, try to hear the sentence under the wall, and ask whose voice it first was. And if your battle is not sentence-shaped, map its triggers and moments instead; both are reconnaissance.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- **Morning surrender.** Each morning this week, before your feet do anything important, pray one line: “Jesus, Stronger One, this house is yours.” Seven words, seven days.
- **Reconnaissance, not scorekeeping.** Keep a small private tally of when the old pull shows up: the moment, the mood, the place. You are not grading yourself; you are mapping the enemy’s approach routes. Bring the map (in your head) next week; Session 2 is about how walls get built.
- **Reread.** Midweek, read Luke 11:14-26 slowly, once, and stop on the phrase “one stronger than he.”

THE WALL (SEALED SHEET, HAND OUT WITH TAKE-HOME 1)

Hand each person the sealed sheet attached to Take-Home 1 and say, twice, plainly: no one will ever read this but you. In one sentence, they name the wall they most want down, fold it, seal it, and write their own name on the outside. They bring it back each week unopened. At Session 5, each person will open it alone, in silence, before the Lord.

Say also, warmly and without singling anyone out: if what you are writing involves harm to yourself or anyone else, or a grip you already know is beyond your strength, the bravest thing you can do this week is tell one trusted person: a priest, a counselor, a doctor. Asking for help is a weapon, not a defeat.

CLOSING PRAYER

Stronger One, you have seen the wall we each just named, and you saw it long before tonight.

We do not ask you to help us defend it. We ask you to take it down, in your time, by your power, with the weapons that are not worldly.

Guard this room and everyone in it; let what was spoken here rest here.

Our Father...

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

“For the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds.”

2 Corinthians 10:4

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 1, in order:

1. Luke 11:14-23 (main reading: Beelzebul accusation, finger of God, the strong man and the Stronger One)
2. Exodus 8:19 (Discovery Moment 1: “This is the finger of God”)
3. Luke 11:21-22 (the parable: the armor in which he trusted)
4. Isaiah 49:24-25 (Discovery Moment 2: the captives of the mighty rescued)
5. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (divine power to destroy strongholds; every thought captive)
6. Luke 11:24-26 with Matthew 12:43-45 (the swept house; Matthew supplies “empty”)
7. Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8 (Dig Deeper: the victory’s mechanism)
8. 2 Corinthians 10:4 (memory verse)
9. Leader-prep cross-references (not read in group): Ephesians 6 (Thread Watch)

Session 2: How Walls Get Built

James 1:12-18 · John 8:31-36

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the anatomy of a stronghold: how temptation becomes consent, consent becomes repetition, and repetition forges what feels like fate. Naming the mechanism strips its camouflage; what can be mapped can be besieged. They also discover that the first time God coaches a fallen man in the very moment of temptation (Genesis 4), he speaks as though, in grace, the fight can be won.

Catholic Touchstone. Concupiscence and vice. The Church's precise teaching that an inclination to sin remains in the baptized (CCC 405, 2515), that it is not itself sin and "cannot harm those who do not consent" (CCC 1264), and that "sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts" (CCC 1865).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Last week defined a stronghold; tonight the group watches one being built, course by course. The room will include people who feel uniquely, shamefully broken. The gift of this session is the discovery that the wall went up by a process, a process every sinner since Eden knows from the inside (the sinless Lord and his Immaculate Mother excepted), described with engineering precision in Scripture and the Tradition. Nobody in your group is a special kind of ruined. They are standard-issue fallen humanity, which is exactly who Christ came for.

The spine of the session is James 1:13-15, the embryology of sin. James rules out the oldest excuse first: "God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one" (v. 13). Then he traces the lineage: desire lures and entices; desire "when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death." Notice the metaphor: conception, birth, growth. Sin has a gestation. There is a window (between the lure and the consent) where the thing has not yet been conceived, and that window is where the whole spiritual tradition concentrates its fight. Session 6 will train that fight in detail; tonight the group just needs to see the window exists.

The tradition's classic map of that window comes from St. Gregory the Great: suggestion, delight, consent. The suggestion arrives (a thought, an image, a cue); delight stirs (the flesh warms to it); consent decides. The unbidden suggestion and the involuntary first stirring are not sin; sin enters when the will consents, and the tradition is honest that consent can happen early, by deliberately entertaining the pleasure itself, not only by choosing the outward act. This is why the Church can say with a straight face that concupiscence, the tinder, the inclination itself, is not itself sin though it comes from sin and inclines to it. For scrupulous participants this distinction is oxygen: the pull you feel is the battlefield, not the defeat.

Then the hardening. Repetition is not neutral: "Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts" (CCC 1865). Each yes greases the groove for the next yes, until the groove feels like geology. St. Augustine's chain from last week (will, then desire, then habit, then necessity) is

CCC 1865 lived from the inside. And Jesus names the endpoint without euphemism: “every one who commits sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). The men he says it to are insisting they have never been in bondage to anyone, which is itself the most chilling feature of a mature stronghold: from inside, it looks like freedom, or at least like “just who I am.”

Hold the two edges of the Catholic teaching together all night. Edge one: habit can diminish culpability; the Church says imputability can be “diminished or even nullified” by, among other things, habit (CCC 1735). This is mercy, and someone in your room needs to hear it: God judges the person, not the groove, and he knows the difference between rebellion and captivity. Edge two: diminished culpability is a description of the prisoner, not a blessing on the prison. The same Church that acknowledges the chains may not all be your fault teaches, in the same breath, that Christ intends to strike them off. Never play these edges against each other.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Genesis 4:6-7. The first spiritual-combat instruction in the Bible, spoken by God himself to a man in danger: “sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.” Sin is pictured as a predator crouched at the threshold, and the door is Cain’s to open or hold. Two things matter enormously: God says this after the fall, to a man already angry, and God says “you must master it”: a real command, and (as the Church reads all his commands) one his grace makes genuinely possible. Cain does not master it; the door opens; and, read through this study’s lens, the Bible’s first wall (anger nursed into resentment) becomes the Bible’s first grave. The group finds this passage in Discovery Moment 1.

Proverbs 5:22. “The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is caught in the toils of his sin.” The wisdom tradition’s one-verse physics of vice: the cords that hold the sinner are the ones he wove. Nobody straps a man to his habit; he ties the knots one repetition at a time. The group finds this in Discovery Moment 2.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Gregory the Great

Moralia on Job (the classic analysis, commonly cited at IV.27)

St. Gregory the Great teaches, in substance, that sin advances by steps: first the suggestion, which comes to the mind unbidden (from the enemy, the world, or the flesh); then the delight, as the flesh begins to savor what is proposed; then the consent, when the will agrees. The unbidden suggestion is no sin; but the will can already begin to say yes at the second step, by deliberately dwelling in the pleasure, which the tradition treats as sin even before any outward act.

For our purposes: the wall is built wherever the will says yes, and the earliest ground is the cheapest ground (that phrase is ours, not his): a soul that fights at the suggestion, before delight is entertained, fights the cheapest battle it will ever be offered.

Presented as a summary of St. Gregory’s classic analysis, long received in the Church’s moral tradition; not a direct quotation.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thomas Aquinas

Summa Theologiae I-II (the treatise on habits and vices)

St. Thomas teaches, in substance, that a habit is a kind of second nature: acts repeated leave an inclination in the soul, so that the next act comes more easily, more quickly, and with more pleasure. A habit bent toward evil is a vice; bent toward good, a virtue. The law is the same in both directions.

For our purposes: this is the most hopeful sentence of the night, disguised as the most frightening. The mechanism that built your wall (repetition forming inclination) can be enlisted, under grace, to build acquired virtue in its place; and grace also gives what no repetition can manufacture, the infused virtues that are God's direct gift. The machinery is not your enemy; its current owner is. Session 6 returns here.

Presented as a summary of St. Thomas's teaching on habit; not a direct quotation.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Cassian

Conferences and Institutes (the desert tradition)

St. John Cassian, who carried the wisdom of the Egyptian desert to the West, teaches in substance that great falls begin as unwatched thoughts; that the vices feed and supply one another in sequence; and that the fight is to be joined at a thought's first appearance, before it is entertained.

For our purposes (the image is ours, not his): the fight belongs at the gate, at first appearance, not in the courtyard after the thought has been welcomed, fed, and armed. Your people's tally sheets from last week are gate maps; tonight they learn why the gate matters.

Presented as a summary of the desert teaching St. Cassian recorded; not a direct quotation.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 405 and 2515.** Baptism erases original sin and turns us back to God, but the consequences for nature remain, including an inclination to sin that Tradition calls concupiscence, which is not itself sin.
- **CCC 1264.** Echoing the Council of Trent: concupiscence, the tinder, is left for us to wrestle with, and it cannot harm those who do not consent but resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ. Feeling the pull is not losing the fight.
- **CCC 1865-1866.** "Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts." The capital sins are called capital because they engender other sins: gateway vices that open supply lines for the rest.
- **CCC 1735.** Imputability for an act can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, and other factors. Mercy for the captive; never a lease for the captor.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

THE LIAR'S VOICE (develops tonight). John 8:31-36 is the thread's home text, and tonight the group meets its eeriest feature: men in bondage insisting "we have never been in bondage to any one." The mature stronghold speaks in the first person; the lie sounds like your own voice. Do not yet open John 8:44 (the liar named) or fully cash John 8:32 and 8:36 (the truth and the Son who free); those land in Session 8. Tonight, just let the group notice that slaves can be sincerely sure they are free.

THE ARMOR HE TRUSTED (dormant tonight; resolves Session 4). If someone connects the self-woven cords of Proverbs 5:22 to the enemy's armor, affirm the instinct and park it: "hold that;

Session 4 is armor night.”

THE SWEEPED HOUSE (background). Tonight explains why the swept house refills: the grooves remain when the occupant leaves. Occupancy comes in Sessions 5-6.

THE WALL (sealed sheets return tonight, unopened). Some participants will realize this session has described their sealed sentence with uncomfortable precision. Expect quiet. Do not probe it.

SESSION GOALS

1. Establish from James 1:13 that God tempts no one; the room must not fight this war suspecting the general.
2. Trace James’s embryology of sin (desire, conception, birth, full growth) and locate the window before consent.
3. Learn the tradition’s map of the window: suggestion, delight, consent (St. Gregory), and the desert rule of fighting at the gate (St. Cassian).
4. Define concupiscence precisely and pastorally: the pull is the battlefield, not the defeat (CCC 1264).
5. Name the hardening mechanism (CCC 1865; St. Thomas on habit) and the honest endpoint (John 8:34).
6. Hold both edges: habit can diminish culpability (CCC 1735), and Christ intends real freedom: definitive freedom from sin, with temporal healing that is often gradual.

TIMED PLAN (90 MINUTES)

- Welcome, restate the covenant of the room, opening prayer: 8 min
- Win questions: 10 min
- Build: James 1:12-18 and Discovery Moment 1 (Genesis 4): 25 min
- Build: John 8:31-36 and Discovery Moment 2 (Proverbs 5:22): 17 min
- Build, then press: the bondage-of-the-will steelman: 15 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short: cut the Dig Deeper box and reduce Win to the first question only. Do not cut the concupiscence distinction (Question 5’s answer); for anyone scrupulous in the room it is the sentence of the night.

PASTORAL NOTE FOR THE LEADER (STANDING NOTE, EVERY SESSION)

No one is ever asked to name their battle; keep sharing questions in a general register. Restate confidentiality if anyone new is present. Where a stronghold involves addiction, compulsion, or harm to self or others, walk the person warmly toward Confession, a pastor or spiritual director, and appropriate professional help; grace and good medicine are allies. Tonight’s material on diminished culpability (CCC 1735) must never be delivered as a verdict on any particular person’s state; that discernment belongs to a confessor who knows the soul, not to a Bible study leader.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

*Father of lights, from whom comes every good endowment and every perfect gift:
you tempt no one, you abandon no one, and you have never once been the voice that lured us.
Show us tonight, without shame and without illusion, how our walls were built,
that we may learn where you intend to strike them.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What is a small habit you picked up without ever deciding to (a phrase you say, a route you take, a way you check your phone)? How did it install itself?
2. When you were a kid, what did the adults warn you “will become a habit”? Were they right?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

Read James 1:12-18 aloud.

3. Before James explains how temptation works, what possibility does he slam the door on in verse 13? Why does that matter so much for people in a long fight?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

That God is behind the temptation: “God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one.” You cannot fight a war while suspecting the general of running both sides. James clears the air completely: the God who permits your battle is not the author of your lure. He tests (as the tradition likes to say, the way gold is tested); he does not bait. Whatever voice invites you toward the wall, it is never his.

4. Walk slowly through verses 14-15. What are the stages? What kind of metaphor is James using, and what does it imply about a moment when the process can still be stopped?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Lured and enticed by desire; desire conceives; conception gives birth to sin; sin grows to full strength and brings forth death. It is an embryology: sin has a gestation. Which means there is a window between the lure and the conception, a moment when the thing does not yet exist, and the entire spiritual tradition of the Church concentrates its fight in that window. The wall is cheapest to fight before a brick is laid.

The tradition’s classic map of the window (St. Gregory the Great): suggestion, then delight, then consent. The suggestion just arrives, and is no sin; sin enters wherever the will says yes, and the yes can come early, by deliberately dwelling in the delight, not only at the outward act. So the tradition fights at the suggestion and the first stir of delight, before the will settles. We will train the fight in that window in Session 6. Tonight it is enough to see the window exists.

DISCOVERY MOMENT 1

Say: the very first time in the Bible that God personally coaches a human being about temptation, he uses a picture of something waiting at a door. It happens to a man who is angry, just before the first murder. Send the group hunting in early Genesis (they are looking for Genesis 4:6-7).

Have it read aloud: “sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.” Ask three questions. What is sin pictured as? (A predator, crouched, patient.) When does God say this, before or after the fall? (After: this is coaching for fallen people.) And what does “you must master it” assume? (That the command is real and mastery genuinely possible: not by bare willpower, the Church will insist, but by the grace God does not refuse; tonight’s steelman presses exactly this.) Then let the weight land: Cain does not master it, and anger nursed into resentment becomes, in this study’s language, the Bible’s first interior wall, and then its first grave. The door is real, and it swings both ways.

5. Be honest about the pull itself: the inclination, the appetite, the “couching at the door.” The Church has a name for it: concupiscence. Is feeling the pull the same as sinning? What difference does the answer make to someone who feels the pull every single day?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

No. The Church is surgically precise here: the inclination remains even in the baptized (CCC 405, 2515), it comes from sin and presses toward sin, but it is not itself sin, and, echoing the Council of Trent, it cannot harm those who do not consent but resist by the grace of Christ (CCC 1264). The pull is the battlefield, not the defeat.

For anyone in a long fight this is oxygen. The daily experience of wanting the wrong thing does not mean you have already lost; it means you are a combatant. Shame says “the fact that you want it proves what you are.” The Church says the fight itself, sustained in grace, is precisely what a free soul at war looks like.

Read John 8:31-36 aloud.

6. Jesus says “every one who commits sin is a slave to sin.” Look at who he is talking to and what they claim in verse 33. What is chilling about their answer, and what does it reveal about a fully built stronghold?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

They answer, “We are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to any one,” which is astonishing on its face (their nation’s founding story is an escape from bondage, and they say it as subjects of Roman rule). But that is what the exchange dramatizes for us: the mature stronghold is invisible from inside. It does not feel like a cell; it feels like “just who I am,” even like freedom. The lie has been repeated until it speaks in the first person.

Repetition is the mortar: “Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts” (CCC 1865). Each yes makes the next yes cheaper, until the groove feels like geology. St. Thomas calls habit a second nature; St. Augustine felt it as a chain of his own welding. And note verse 35 quietly for later: slaves do not remain in the house forever, “the son continues for ever.” How the Son makes slaves into free sons is where this whole study is headed; do not cash it tonight.

DISCOVERY MOMENT 2

Say: the wisdom books compress tonight's whole session into one verse about cords. Send the group to Proverbs 5 to find it (verse 22).

"The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is caught in the toils of his sin." Ask: in this verse, who wove the cords that hold the man? Let it be uncomfortable and then let it be honest and hopeful: the verse names the self-woven strands, and pastoral truth adds that wounds, coercion, and outside forces are often woven in too, with culpability varying accordingly (CCC 1735). But whatever else is in the rope, the strands your own repetitions supplied can, in grace, be unwound: not mechanically or on a schedule, and often with community and good treatment helping, but really. The same fingers that tie can, in grace, learn to untie.

Build, Then Press: The Reformer's Case

BUILD THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

A thoughtful Protestant friend, quoting our own texts, says: "This is why Luther wrote On the Bondage of the Will, and why my tradition still stands with him. Jesus said it: the sinner is a slave, and slaves do not free themselves. When God told Cain 'you must master it,' the command proved Cain's duty, not his ability, and the grave proved the point. The unregenerate will cannot turn itself; even the regenerate fight only because grace first unbinds the will. So talk of 'fighting at the gate,' addressed to a bound will as if it were free, is law without gospel: it manufactures despair in the honest and Pharisees in the lucky. Grace alone frees; only then is there a fighter."

Let the group feel its real weight before answering. It takes slavery more seriously than we sometimes do, it protects grace's primacy, it exhorts real fighting (the Reformers preached mortification, not passivity), and it describes real people: everyone has met the despairing striver and the self-made Pharisee.

7. Now press from the texts we just read: what does God's coaching of Cain, Trent's "by the grace of Jesus Christ," and John 8:36 together say that this objection is missing?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Grant what is true: the slave cannot free himself; grace is first, last, and decisive; and moralizing pep talks really do produce despair and Pharisees. The Church condemned the idea that fallen man can lift himself by his own works long before the Reformers were born.

And Catholic teaching agrees with more of it than the friend expects: no one lifts himself by his own works; grace is first, last, and decisive. Where we refuse to follow is the remaining inch: that the freed will contributes nothing of its own. The Council of Trent teaches that God does not command the impossible, but bids us do what we can and ask for what we cannot, his grace making the doing possible (Session VI, ch. 11); and the same council's teaching stands behind CCC 1264: resistance is genuinely possible "by the grace of Jesus Christ." "You must master it" was never a trap; it was a promise wearing a command's clothes. Grace does not replace your will like a spare part; it heals and empowers it, so that your fighting is not an alternative to grace but grace's own visible operation in you. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13): both halves, no contradiction. So the Son truly frees (John 8:36), and the freed man truly fights, and these are one motion, not two

rival ones. What we never say: “God has done his part, now do yours,” as if the fight were self-powered. What we also never say: “since grace is everything, stand down.” The freed man garrisoning his own liberated house is what victory looks like on the ground.

DIG DEEPER (IF TIME ALLOWS)

Romans 6:16-18: Paul’s two slaveries. “you are slaves of the one whom you obey...” (v. 16, abridged): every repetition enlists you somewhere, and there is no neutral. The good news hiding in the grammar: “and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness” (v. 18): the same habit machinery running in reverse under a new Lord.

CCC 1866: the capital sins are called capital because they engender other sins. Vices run supply lines to each other; a stronghold rarely stands alone. Mapping which vice supplies yours is Session 6 work.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT

8. Where has “just this once” quietly become “this is who I am”? You do not need to say it aloud. But notice, from tonight, that the sentence “this is who I am” is exactly what a finished wall sounds like from inside.

9. Your tally from last week is a gate map: it shows where the suggestions arrive. What would it look like, concretely, to fight one battle this week at the gate instead of in the courtyard?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- **One pre-decided move.** Pick your most common trigger moment from your tally and decide now, in peacetime, what you will do when it comes: leave the room, pray one line (“Jesus, Stronger One, this house is yours”), text a friend, put the phone in another room. Wars are won in peacetime decisions.
- **The three-minute examen.** Each night, three minutes: where did the pull start today (the suggestion), where did it warm (the delight), and where was the door held or opened? End every examen the same way, win or lose: thank God for one thing, and ask, “Stronger One, hold the door with me tomorrow.”
- **Reread.** Midweek, read James 1:12-18 once, slowly, and stop on “he himself tempts no one.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you told us the truth tonight: what we repeated, we became, and the cords are our own weaving.

We refuse the lie that the pull is the verdict, and we refuse the lie that the wall is our name.

*Meet each of us at the gate this week, in the window you have kept open,
and teach our hands to untie what they tied.*

Our Father...

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

“If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

Genesis 4:7

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 2, in order:

1. James 1:12-18 (main reading: God tempts no one; the embryology of sin)
2. Genesis 4:6-7 (Discovery Moment 1: sin couching at the door; you must master it)
3. John 8:31-36 (main reading: slave to sin; the claim of never having been in bondage)
4. Proverbs 5:22 (Discovery Moment 2: caught in the toils of his own sin)
5. Philippians 2:12-13 (steelman answer: work out, for God is at work in you)
6. Romans 6:16-18 (Dig Deeper: two slaveries)
7. Genesis 4:7 (memory verse)
8. Leader-prep cross-reference (not opened with the group): John 8:44 (Thread Watch)

Session 3: Know Your Enemy

Genesis 3:1-13 · Matthew 4:1-11

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the enemy's actual tactics by watching two foundational, deliberately contrasted campaigns: Eden, where the campaign succeeds, and the wilderness, where every move fails. They learn to recognize the same grammar of attack in their own campaigns, and they learn the Church's sober rules of engagement: what is ours to do against the enemy, and what is deliberately not.

Catholic Touchstone. The reality and the limits of Satan (CCC 391-395: "the power of Satan is, nonetheless, not infinite"); the petition "lead us not into temptation" (CCC 2846-2849); and the Church's ordered ministry of exorcism (CCC 1673).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Tonight requires the steadiest hand of the whole study, because two opposite errors sit in every room that talks about the devil. Some participants half-believe he is a cartoon, and for them the session restores biblical realism. Others are afraid of him, perhaps privately very afraid, and for them the session must end with the fear smaller, not larger. Your north star is CCC 395: Satan is real, active, malicious, and a creature on a leash, "not infinite" in power, permitted to act only within limits set by a Providence that is stronger and kinder than he is cruel. If the room only remembers one sentence, make it that one.

Watch his method in Genesis 3, because it is his whole playbook; he has never needed another. Move one: question the Word ("Did God say...?"), introducing not an argument but a fog. Move two: deny the consequence flatly ("You will not die"), the first flat denial of God's word recorded in Scripture. Move three: reframe God as a rival ("God knows that when you eat of it... you will be like God"), recasting the Father's protection as jealousy, his command as a cage. Notice what the serpent never does: he never forces. He has no hands in the garden. In Eden, his entire arsenal is the sentence; Eve's hands do everything else. That is tonight's central comfort disguised as its central threat: in the campaign for your consent, which is the war this study fights, his weapon is the lie, and the lie is disarmed by the truth. (Scripture also shows permitted affliction beyond words, Job above all, always under God's limits; but a wall is built by consent, and consent is won by lying.)

Then the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11), the same three-move campaign run against the new Adam, and this time the ground is not a garden but a desert, the combatant is not full but starving, and every move fails. The first two temptations open with "If you are the Son of God...", and all three attack trust in the Father, each offering a shortcut past the Father's timing: bread without dependence, vindication without obedience, kingdoms without the cross. Jesus answers all three from the same small stretch of Scripture, Deuteronomy 6-8, Israel's own wilderness manual: he fights as true Israel, with the memorized Word, and the group will discover this themselves in the session's central discovery moment. Note carefully for Question 5: the devil quotes Scripture too (Psalm 91, torn from context). The

Word in his mouth is bait; the test of any voice is where it leads, toward trusting obedience or toward testing God and taking shortcuts.

Third text: 1 Peter 5:8-9 and James 4:7 give the Church's standing orders, and their verbs are chosen with precision. Be sober; be watchful; resist, firm in your faith; submit yourselves to God. Notice what is not on the list: panicking, conversing, negotiating, commanding. The promise attached is flat and glorious: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." The promise is real, not poetry, though Luke's "until an opportune time" reminds us the rout is not always final: resistance genuinely wins ground even when the siege resumes. St. Antony's witness (Session 1) stands behind the verse: demons intimidate with noise and apparitions, and steadiness in prayer routs them.

Finally, tonight carries the study's formal guardrail on deliverance, and you should teach it plainly rather than apologetically, because it is not bureaucracy; it is battlefield doctrine, and the steelman chain will let the group discover the scriptural case for it themselves (Acts 19). The short version you will teach: every baptized person is armed to resist; commanding is not our lane. The defined rule: solemn exorcism is reserved to a priest with his bishop's permission (CCC 1673; canon 1172). The broader rule of this study, matching the Church's discipline and long pastoral wisdom: laypeople do not address, interrogate, or command demons; we renounce, resist, and pray to God. The first-person renunciation we teach ("in the name of Jesus, I renounce the lie that...") is a personal adaptation inspired by the baptismal renunciation of Satan, not the rite's own wording. If anyone in your group fears something beyond ordinary temptation is happening to them or their family, a prudent and safe path: see your pastor (and go to Confession), and do not delay ordinary medical or mental-health care while you do; any diocesan inquiry will itself insist on serious medical and psychological evaluation, because grace and good medicine are allies. No demon-hunting, no diagnosing others, no occult fascination, and no fear: the room should leave tonight less afraid than it arrived.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Genesis 3:1-13. The tactics manual, read tonight as a main text: fog the Word, deny the death, slander the Father. And the aftermath teaches too: shame, hiding, and blame-shifting (vv. 7-13) are the enemy's occupation policy once the wall is breached. Every stronghold keeps all three on staff.

Deuteronomy 6-8. Jesus's entire wilderness arsenal: "man does not live by bread alone" (8:3), "you shall not put the LORD your God to the test" (6:16), "you shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve him" (6:13, with "him only shall you serve" in Jesus's citation). Forty years of Israel's failure answered by forty days of the Son's fidelity. The group finds these in the central discovery moment; do not name them in advance.

Job 1:12 and 2:6. The leash, for the Dig Deeper box: in the Bible's great drama of permitted affliction, the accuser must ask, and God sets the limits, twice, explicitly. Whatever else the book of Job is doing (and the Church leaves latitude on its genre), on this it is unambiguous: the enemy operates on permission he does not grant himself.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Ignatius of Loyola

Spiritual Exercises, Rules for the Discernment of Spirits (First Week)

St. Ignatius teaches, in substance, three rules that map directly onto stronghold warfare. First, the enemy is weak before firm resistance and strong before wavering: met with a decided front at the

first suggestion, he loses heart; coddled, he grows bold. Second, like a false lover he demands secrecy: his whispers depend on staying whispers, and he is undone the moment the soul discloses them to a confessor or a wise guide. Third, like a commander besieging a fortress, he circles the walls and strikes where the defenses are weakest.

For our purposes: notice that the third rule is literally a stronghold image; the great tactician of discernment assumed the siege picture this study is built on. And notice which rule costs the least and wins the most: telling someone. Secrecy is not privacy; it is the enemy's supply line.

Presented as a faithful summary of the First Week rules (in the region of Rules 12-14); not a direct quotation.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Francis de Sales

Introduction to the Devout Life, Part IV

St. Francis de Sales teaches, in substance, that temptation itself, however long, violent, or disgusting, is not sin, and that the soul is stained only when the will consents. The feeling of the temptation and the yes of the will are two different things; and so long as the yes is withheld, the battle, far from displeasing God, honors him. He counsels the tempted not to be alarmed at the fierceness of the attack: intensity of temptation is not evidence of defeat.

For our purposes: this is Session 2's concupiscence teaching wearing armor, from the Doctor of the Church popularly known as the gentleman saint. As spiritual writers like to put it (the image is ours to use, not his): the enemy besieges most furiously the city he has not taken. The intensity of your temptation is not evidence of your corruption; it may be evidence of your resistance.

Presented as a summary of his teaching on temptation in Part IV of the Introduction; not a direct quotation.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Teresa of Ávila

The Book of Her Life, and her teaching generally

St. Teresa writes, in substance, that the devils frighten only the souls that hand them the advantage, and that a soul in God's grace need not be cowed by their threats: fear itself is the ground they trade on, and the soul that stays close to its Lord finds the terrors shrink to their true size.

For our purposes: this is the exit door from tonight for anyone who arrived afraid. St. Teresa's witness is that clear sight of the enemy and deep confidence in Christ grow together: she feared him little precisely because she looked at him only while looking at Christ.

Presented as a summary of her well-attested teaching; wording varies by translation, so no direct quotation is given.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 391-395.** Satan is not a symbol but a fallen angel, a creature: originally good, self-ruined by irrevocable choice, active in hatred of God and his kingdom, and strictly limited. "The power of Satan is, nonetheless, not infinite" (395), and he acts only within the permissions of Providence. The Church's constant teaching adds the clarification this study leans on: he cannot force the free consent of the will.
- **CCC 2846-2849.** On "lead us not into temptation": God tempts no one; the petition asks that we not be allowed to enter into temptation's consent, and it distinguishes trials (which grow the soul) from

temptation (which aims at sin and death). The battle of prayer and the battle against the enemy are one battle.

- **CCC 1673.** Exorcism: the Church's public and authoritative petition, in Jesus's name, for protection against the power of the Evil One and, in its solemn form, for expulsion; solemn ("major") exorcism is reserved to a priest with the bishop's permission, exercised with prudence and in strict observance of the Church's rules, and never a substitute for the care of medicine, whose domain the Church herself insists on distinguishing. This paragraph anchors tonight's guardrail.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

THE LIAR'S VOICE (develops strongly tonight). Genesis 3 is where the voice is first recorded, and "You will not die" is its signature cadence: flat denial of consequence, delivered with perfect confidence. Tonight the group learns to recognize the voice's grammar. Its owner is named, and its defeat by the truth is cashed, in Session 8; if someone quotes John 8:44 ("a liar and the father of lies"), affirm it and park the full text.

THE ARMOR HE TRUSTED (develops tonight; resolves Session 4). Tonight inventories the enemy's Eden armory and finds only sentences: the fog, the denial, the slander. Next week Luke 11:22's "armor in which he trusted" meets Ephesians 6, and the group reaches the study's synthesis: his trusted armor is best read as the lie, stripped at the cross; ours is issued by God, piece by piece. If anyone says "wait, his weapon is words," smile and hold it one week.

THE SWEPT HOUSE (background). The wilderness ends with "then the devil left him" (Matthew 4:11), and Luke's parallel adds "until an opportune time." Resistance is real and the enemy is persistent; occupancy (Sessions 5-6) is still the answer to return visits.

THE WALL (sealed sheets, unopened). Two sessions from opening. Tonight's disclosure teaching (St. Ignatius's second rule) may move someone to tell a confessor or friend what their sheet says. That is not a breach of the mechanic; it is the mechanic working. The sheet stays private to the group; it was never meant to be private from grace.

SESSION GOALS

1. Establish the enemy's reality and his limits in the same breath (CCC 391, 395): real, malicious, on a leash.
2. Map the three moves of Eden: fog the Word, deny the death, slander the Father; and the occupation policy: shame, hiding, blame.
3. Watch the same campaign fail in the wilderness, and discover Jesus's arsenal (Deuteronomy, memorized) by group hunt.
4. Learn the standing orders and their exact verbs: sober, watchful, resist, submit; never panic, converse, or command.
5. Teach the deliverance guardrail plainly (CCC 1673) and let the steelman's Acts 19 discovery show why it is battlefield doctrine, not gatekeeping.
6. Send everyone home with a countersword verse and one act of disclosure; the room leaves less afraid than it arrived.

TIMED PLAN (90 MINUTES)

- Welcome, covenant, opening prayer: 8 min

- Win questions: 10 min
- Build: Genesis 3:1-13, the three moves: 20 min
- Build: Matthew 4:1-11 with the Deuteronomy discovery: 22 min
- Build: standing orders (1 Peter 5, James 4) and the steelman with Acts 19: 15 min
- Send, Live It This Week, St. Michael prayer and closing: 15 min

If time runs short: cut the Dig Deeper box and compress Genesis 3 to verses 1-6 with the three moves named by you rather than drawn out. Do not cut the guardrail teaching or the Acts 19 discovery; they are the safety rails for everything this study says about the enemy.

WHAT IS OURS TO DO, AND WHAT IS NOT (TEACH THIS ALOUD TONIGHT)

OURS, BY BAPTISM: prayer in Jesus's name; the sacraments, above all Confession and the Eucharist; renunciation in the first person ("in the name of Jesus, I renounce the lie that..."), a personal adaptation of the baptismal renunciation we renew each Easter; sacramentals used with faith (holy water, the crucifix, the St. Michael prayer); Scripture memorized and spoken; resisting, firm in the faith (1 Peter 5:9); telling the truth to a confessor or trusted guide.

NOT OURS: addressing, questioning, conversing with, or commanding evil spirits; freelance "deliverance sessions"; diagnosing other people's afflictions as demonic; occult experimentation of any kind, including the divination and spiritism the Church names as grave (CCC 2116-2117). Solemn exorcism belongs to a priest with his bishop's mandate (CCC 1673).

IF SOMEONE IS AFRAID something beyond ordinary temptation is at work: no drama, no shame, and no internet rabbit holes. A prudent path: your pastor and Confession, with the diocese involved if warranted, and ordinary medical or mental-health care never delayed in the meantime; any Church inquiry will itself insist on serious medical and psychological evaluation, because she refuses to let spiritual language displace real care. Reassure them: the ordinary means of grace are not the consolation prize; they are the arsenal.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you walked into the desert on purpose, hungry, to meet the tempter on our behalf, and you won.

Tonight we study an enemy you have already beaten.

Give us clear eyes and steady hearts: sober, watchful, unafraid.

Let nothing in this room glorify him, and everything in it glorify you.

Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

1. In sports or games, how much of winning is simply knowing the other side's tendencies? What changes once you have seen an opponent's favorite move often enough to see it coming?
2. What is an advertising or sales tactic you can now spot instantly (the countdown timer, the "only 2 left")? How did learning the trick change its power over you?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

Read Genesis 3:1-13 aloud.

3. Track the serpent's words in verses 1-5. What are his moves, in order? Write them on a whiteboard if you have one; the list matters.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Move one: fog the Word. "Did God say...?" (v. 1): not an argument, a haze; the command is misquoted and made to sound absurd. Move two: deny the death. "You will not die" (v. 4): the first flat lie in Scripture, consequence erased with total confidence. Move three: slander the Father. "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God" (v. 5): the protecting Father recast as a jealous rival, the command recast as a cage.

Fog, denial, slander. He has never needed a fourth move. Every stronghold in this room was built with some mix of the three.

4. Now notice what the serpent never does in the entire chapter. What is missing from his attack, and why is that the most important tactical fact of the night?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He never forces anything. He has no hands in this garden; he touches neither the fruit nor the woman. In this scene his entire arsenal is the sentence. Eve's eyes, Eve's hands, Adam's consent do all the physical work. In the campaign for consent, the enemy fights as a propagandist, not an army.

Feel both edges of that. The threatening edge: your own faculties can be enlisted against you by nothing more than a believed lie. The comforting edge, which is bigger: where his weapon is the lie, and in the war for your consent it is, the truth fully disarms him. He cannot make you do anything; he cannot force the will. He can only make suggestions sound true. That is why this war is winnable

by ordinary people, and why the weapons (truth, prayer, sacrament) look so unmilitary. And mark his occupation policy once the wall falls (vv. 7-13): shame, hiding, blame. A useful rule of discernment (not a diagnosis; shame has ordinary human causes too): conscience convicts concretely and draws toward the Father; the accuser condemns globally and drives into hiding.

Read Matthew 4:1-11 aloud.

5. Same enemy, same playbook, different ground. Where do you see the Eden moves repeated here, and what do all three temptations attack first?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Twice he opens with “If you are the Son of God”: the fog again, aimed now at identity, and aimed at the exact sentence the Father spoke over Jesus in the immediately preceding scene, at his baptism (“This is my beloved Son,” Matthew 3:17). Each temptation then offers a shortcut past the Father’s timing: bread without dependence, a spectacle of vindication without obedience, the kingdoms without the cross. And note the escalation in move three: in Eden he implied God was withholding; here he openly demands worship.

Watch verse 6 closely: the devil quotes Scripture (Psalm 91) selectively (he drops “to guard you in all your ways”) and tears it from context, to bait a shortcut. The Word in his mouth is a lure. The test of any voice, even a Bible-quoting one, is where it leads: toward trusting obedience, or toward testing God and grabbing early.

DISCOVERY MOMENT (THE HEART OF THE NIGHT)

Say: Jesus answers all three temptations with “It is written,” and all three quotations come from one small stretch of one Old Testament book, a manual written for people in a wilderness. Hand out Bibles, give the trailhead (Deuteronomy, chapters 6 through 8), and let the group hunt down all three: they are looking for Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, and 6:13.

When all three are found, ask: what wilderness history is Deuteronomy addressing? (Moses, at the end of the forty years, reviewing where Israel failed: bread, testing God, false worship.) What is Jesus doing in forty days? (Retaking Israel’s failed ground as the true Son.) Then the practical edge, and press it warmly: Matthew shows Jesus answering at once, with the Word already internalized, no scroll in the desert. Ask the group what they currently have memorized and loaded for their own recurring fight. Tonight’s Live It puts a sword in everyone’s hand.

Read 1 Peter 5:8-9 and James 4:7 aloud.

6. These are the Church’s standing orders. List the verbs we are given. Now list the verbs we are conspicuously not given. What do the two lists teach?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Given: be sober, be watchful, resist, stand firm in the faith, submit yourselves to God. Now set beside it what the Church’s discipline and long wisdom decline to hand us (this second list is teaching, not something the verses print): panicking, fleeing from him in terror, negotiating, conversing, investigating, commanding. The posture is a soldier on watch, not a hunter on safari and not a refugee in flight. One distinction keeps the verbs straight: we do flee temptation’s occasions (1

Corinthians 6:18 and 10:14 command exactly that); we do not flee the devil, because resisted, he is the one who flees.

And the promise attached is flat: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Notice who does the fleeing, and remember the promise is real without being a timetable: attacks can resume “at an opportune time,” and resistance still wins. St. Antony’s witness from Session 1 stands behind the verse: demons trade on noise and fear; steadiness in prayer routs them. Note also the order in James: submit to God first, then resist. Resistance not rooted in submission is willpower in a costume.

Build, Then Press: The Deliverance Question

BUILD THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

A zealous friend from a deliverance-ministry background says: “Why does your Church chain up the weapons? Jesus gave his people authority over the enemy: he told the seventy, ‘I have given you authority... over all the power of the enemy’ (Luke 10:19), and the Gospel promise says it outright: ‘in my name they will cast out demons’ (Mark 16:17). Every Christian has that authority, and telling laypeople they cannot command the enemy in Jesus’s name leaves the army disarmed while the officers do the fighting. That is institutional gatekeeping, not the New Testament.”

Give it its full weight: it is quoting real verses, it takes the enemy seriously, and it flatters something in all of us that would rather command than confess.

DISCOVERY MOMENT (INSIDE THE STEELMAN)

Say: the New Testament actually records what happens when freelancers command demons in Jesus’s name without being sent. It is in Acts 19, and it did not go well. Let the group find Acts 19:13-16 and have it read aloud, including the demon’s answer: “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?”

Read Jude 9 aloud (one verse).

7. Now press: put Luke 10, Acts 19, and Jude 9 side by side. What does authority over the enemy actually look like in the New Testament, and what is the Church protecting with her rule?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Grant what is true: the authority is real, the enemy does flee at Jesus’s name, and the Church has never taught that laypeople are unarmed; she arms them lavishly (grace, sacraments, Scripture, sacramentals, the resistance James promises will succeed).

But look at the pattern. The seventy commanded demons because Jesus appointed and sent them (Luke 10:1): the authority was given, specific, and ordered to mission, not ambient; and Mark 16:17’s promise lives inside that same sent, believing, ecclesial mission, which is why the Church has always regulated its exercise rather than denied it. The sons of Sceva in Acts 19 were not even Christians: freelancers wielding the name as a formula, without relationship or sending, and the demon’s reply exposes the whole difference: “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” The name of Jesus is not a syllable-spell; authority in the kingdom is derived and ordered. And even the archangel Michael, disputing with the devil, “did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you’” (Jude 9): a witness of humility that supports, though it alone does not

prove, the Church's reserve. If Michael defers the duel to the Lord, the baptized can be content with the arsenal actually issued to them.

So the Church's rule (solemn exorcism reserved to a priest with his bishop's mandate, CCC 1673) is not the officers hoarding the weapons. It is the ancient battlefield doctrine that duels are for the sent, and it protects the very people it frustrates. Meanwhile the promise to every baptized person stands untouched and unbeatable: submit to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you. That is not the consolation prize. Ask St. Antony: it is how the war is actually won.

DIG DEEPER (IF TIME ALLOWS)

Job 1:12 and 2:6: the leash, stated twice. In Job's narrative the accuser acts only within limits God sets and he cannot cross. Whatever latitude the Church leaves on Job's genre, the point stands: the enemy operates on permissions he does not grant himself.

2 Corinthians 11:14: "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." His best work rarely looks dark; it looks like liberation, self-care, enlightenment, or (v. 6 of Matthew 4) a Bible verse. Test the destination, not the costume.

Genesis 3:15: before the serpent leaves Eden, God promises enmity between him and the woman, between his seed and hers. The Church has always heard the first gospel here, and the tradition's devotion to Our Lady in this war (the Rosary above all) grows from this verse: the enemy has been promised a losing fight from the third chapter of the Bible.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT

8. Which of the three moves works best on you: the fog ("did God really say"), the denial ("nothing bad will happen"), or the slander ("God is holding out on you")? You know your wall from Session 1; you likely just met its architect's favorite move.

9. St. Ignatius says the enemy, like a false lover, demands secrecy, and is undone by disclosure. Who is your tell-someone person: the confessor, director, or trusted friend whose daylight your whispers cannot survive?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- **Forge your countersword.** Pick one verse aimed at your recurring lie and memorize it cold this week; write it on a card and carry it. Fighting words, examples: for the fog, "The word of the Lord abides for ever" (1 Peter 1:25); for the denial, "sin is couching at the door" (Genesis 4:7); for the slander, "He who did not spare his own Son... will he not also give us all things with him?" (Romans 8:32). Jesus fought from memory. So will you.
- **Break one secrecy.** Tell your tell-someone person one whisper you have been keeping private: not necessarily your wall, any whisper. Do it in daylight, this week. Watch what happens to its volume.
- **Post the watch.** Add the St. Michael prayer to your night prayers this week, and pray it as a soldier reporting to the watch commander, not as a man whistling past a graveyard.

CLOSING PRAYER

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle; be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil.

May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

Lord Jesus, we have seen the enemy's three moves, and we have seen you beat all three, hungry, for us. Keep us sober, watchful, and unafraid, and bring us back next week for the armor. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

James 4:7

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 3, in order:

1. Genesis 3:1-13 (main reading: the three moves and the occupation policy)
2. Matthew 4:1-11 (main reading: the wilderness campaign; the devil quotes Psalm 91 at v. 6)
3. Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:16; 6:13 (Discovery Moment: Jesus's arsenal, found by group hunt)
4. 1 Peter 5:8-9 (standing orders: sober, watchful, resist)
5. James 4:7 (standing orders: submit, resist, and the promise)
6. Luke 10:1, 17-19 (steelman: authority given to the seventy who were appointed and sent)
7. Acts 19:13-16 (steelman discovery: the sons of Sceva)
8. Jude 9 (steelman: even Michael said "The Lord rebuke you")
9. Job 1:12; 2:6 (Dig Deeper: the leash)
10. 2 Corinthians 11:14; Genesis 3:15 (Dig Deeper: angel of light; the first promise of enmity)
11. James 4:7 (memory verse)

THE STRONGER ONE

Session 4: The Armory

Ephesians 6:10-18

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that God does not send his soldiers to war in their own clothes: he issues armor, piece by piece, and (the session's central discovery) the central pieces are his own armor: Isaiah saw the LORD himself put on the breastplate and helmet Paul later names. Tonight the study's second thread resolves in our synthesis: the enemy's trusted armor is best read as the lie, already stripped; ours is truth, and it is issued, not earned.

Catholic Touchstone. Prayer as battle (CCC 2725); Confirmation's special strength for witness (CCC 1303); the virtue of fortitude (CCC 1808).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Ephesians 6:10-18 is the Bible's best-known armor passage, and familiarity is tonight's main enemy: half your group can recite the pieces and has never once put them on. Your task is to make the passage strange again, and Paul gives you three strangenesses to work with.

First, the grammar of strength. "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" (v. 10): the verb leans passive, closer to "be strengthened." Nobody musters this strength; it is received. And the armor is "of God" not merely because he commands it but because he supplies it: it is worn in the Lord and in the strength of his might. After three sessions inside the anatomy of our weakness, this is the turn: the quartermaster is God, and the requisition form is prayer (v. 18, which is not an afterthought trailing the armor but the mode in which all of it is worn: "Pray at all times in the Spirit").

Second, the enemy list. "We are not contending against flesh and blood" (v. 12). Say this slowly in a room full of people whose strongholds have human faces: the coworker, the ex-husband, the father whose sentence became the wall. Paul insists that no human being is your ultimate enemy. The people who hurt you are morally responsible for what they did, and justice, safeguarding, and boundaries remain fully legitimate; but they are not the power this war is against, and hatred aimed at them serves the real enemy. This verse retargets years of misdirected fire, and for some in your group it will be the sentence of the study.

Third, the inventory itself, read against the strongholds we have mapped. "Having girded your loins with truth" (the soldier's belt): the direct answer to the fog ("Did God say...?"). The breastplate of righteousness over the heart: the answer to accusation and shame (and in Session 5 the group will learn where righteousness is actually issued). Feet shod with the gospel of peace: a soldier's footing; peace as traction, not vacation. The shield of faith quenching "all the flaming darts of the evil one": the darts can certainly include burning sentences (accusations, doubts, despairs), and the shield is not certainty but trust. The helmet of salvation over the mind: Session 6 will spend an evening under that helmet. And one named weapon: "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God": the group already watched this sword used three times in the wilderness, drawn from memory. The inventory's one explicitly named

weapon is the Word, which fits Session 3's discovery that the war for consent is a war against lies, won with truth.

The deep structure, which the central Discovery Moment will surface: Paul did not invent this armor. Isaiah saw the LORD wear it: "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head" (Isaiah 59:17), in a passage where God, finding no man to intervene, arms himself and comes to save. A related girding clothes the Messiah (righteousness and faithfulness, Isaiah 11:5), and the feet shod with good news are Isaiah's herald (52:7); Ephesians' shield and sword are Paul's own additions. So the heart of the kit is God's armor: the Church is issued what her Champion already fought in. And here the study states its synthesis plainly, ours rather than any single verse's claim: Luke 11:22 says the Stronger One "takes away his armor in which he trusted" without naming it; Session 3 found his campaign arsenal to be the sentence; Colossians 2:15 says the powers were disarmed at the cross. Put together: his trusted armor is best read as the lie, and it failed him; ours is the Victor's own kit, and it has never lost.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Isaiah 59:16-17. God sees that there is no one to intervene, so "his own arm brought him victory," and he dresses for war: righteousness as breastplate, salvation as helmet. The breastplate and helmet of Ephesians 6 are borrowed downward from God to us. Central discovery; do not name the wearer in advance.

Isaiah 11:5 and 52:7. The Messiah girded for the same war ("Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins": related girding, where Paul's belt is truth) and the herald's beautiful feet ("who publishes peace"). Secondary finds if the group keeps hunting.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Chrysostom

Homilies on Ephesians (his exposition of the armor, Homily 22 and following)

Preaching through Ephesians, St. John Chrysostom teaches, in substance, that Paul's armor is not ceremonial but campaign issue for a real and unrelenting fight: each piece has its function, the whole kit is meant to be worn, and the soldier of Christ must live in constant readiness.

For our purposes (the images are ours): the armor is a kit, not a menu, and a man armored everywhere but the head is a casualty waiting for his wound. Most stronghold relapses walk in through the one piece left on the bench.

Presented as a broad summary of his preaching on the passage; the kit and casualty images are this study's illustrations, not his wording.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Patrick

The Lorica ("St. Patrick's Breastplate"), long attributed to him

The great Irish battle-prayer long attributed to St. Patrick arms the Christian not with things but with a Person: "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left." The prayer binds Christ to the body like plate to a torso, at rising and lying down, in the eye and ear of every man the pray-er meets.

For our purposes: this is Ephesians 6 prayed instead of parsed. The armor of God, worn, invites us to

see Christ himself put on (Romans 13:14). Teach someone the Lorica and you have handed them the whole session.

Attribution of the Lorica to St. Patrick is traditional rather than certain; the prayer is ancient and long used in Christian devotion, especially in Ireland. Quoted in a commonly received English form; translations vary.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Alphonsus Liguori

Prayer, the Great Means of Salvation and of Perfection

St. Alphonsus teaches, in substance and with famous bluntness, that prayer is the great and necessary means of salvation: in his celebrated axiom, the one who prays is certainly saved, and the one who does not pray is certainly lost. God, he teaches, ordinarily grants his help through our asking, and prayer itself is grace's gift before it is our work.

For our purposes (the military images are ours): prayer is the weapon the weakest hand can always lift, and the enemy's first objective in any siege is to talk the garrison out of praying. Verse 18 is not the caboose of the armor; it is the supply line, alongside the sacraments the coming session opens. If your people take one habit from tonight, let it be the one St. Alphonsus would choose.

Presented as a close summary of his celebrated axiom and teaching in that work, understood as his doctrine of prayer as the ordinary and necessary means, not a mechanical guarantee; not a verbatim quotation.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 2725.** "Prayer is a battle." The Catechism's own opening words, which it unfolds: against ourselves, and against the wiles of the tempter who does all he can to draw us away from prayer and from union with God (CCC 2725, paraphrased beyond the opening words). The Catechism itself names the struggle to pray as central to the life of prayer.
- **CCC 1303.** Confirmation gives "a special strength of the Holy Spirit" to spread and defend the faith as true witnesses of Christ. Most of your group has already been issued more armor than they have ever drawn from stores.
- **CCC 1808.** "Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good." The armor presumes a spine inside it; fortitude is that spine, and it grows by use.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

THE ARMOR HE TRUSTED (RESOLVES TONIGHT). Luke 11:22 left a phrase hanging in Session 1: the Stronger One "takes away his armor in which he trusted." Session 3 quietly inventoried the enemy's armory and found only sentences. Tonight the group holds both halves of the study's synthesis: his trusted armor is best read as the lie, stripped at the cross (Luke 11:22 with Session 3's inventory and Colossians 2:15: teach it honestly as our synthesis, not any verse's explicit claim); the heart of our armor is God's own (Isaiah 59:17), issued to us. When the discovery lands, name the resolution and enjoy it; the study has been walking toward this for three weeks.

THE LIAR'S VOICE (develops). The flaming darts of verse 16 are the voice's ammunition: burning sentences. The shield that quenches them is faith, trust in the Father the voice slanders. Final naming still waits for Session 8.

THE SWEPT HOUSE (near horizon). Tonight ends with the group armored; next week the house gets

occupied. If someone asks “but where do I actually get the breastplate of righteousness?”, smile: that is literally next session (Confession).

THE WALL (one week out). Remind the group at closing, briefly and warmly: bring your sealed sheet next week. Next session it opens, alone, before the Lord.

SESSION GOALS

1. Recover the passive grammar of verse 10: strength received, armor issued, prayer as the requisition line.
2. Retarget the war with verse 12: no human being is the ultimate enemy, though human agency and just boundaries remain real.
3. Map each piece of armor onto the stronghold war the group has already studied: fog, accusation, restlessness, darts, despair.
4. Discover Isaiah 59:17 by group hunt: the heart of the armor of God is God’s own armor, worn first by the Victor.
5. Resolve the study’s second thread as our stated synthesis: his armor (the lie) stripped; our armor (truth) issued.
6. Send everyone home wearing it: the Lorica, a daily suiting-up prayer, and verse 18 restored to its place as supply line.

TIMED PLAN (90 MINUTES)

- Welcome, covenant, opening prayer: 8 min
- Win questions: 10 min
- Build: verses 10-13, the grammar and the real enemy: 20 min
- Build: the inventory, verses 14-17, mapped to the stronghold war: 20 min
- Discovery Moment: Isaiah 59:17 and the thread resolution: 12 min
- Steelman, Send, Live It, Lorica and closing: 20 min

A prep note on fasting: the tradition’s constant companion to combat prayer is fasting; this study does not build a session on it, but name it as ordinary equipment, and an optional fast day appears in Session 5’s Live It.

If time runs short: cut the Dig Deeper box and take Win question 1 only. Do not cut the Isaiah discovery or the verse 12 retargeting; they are the hinge and the healing of the night.

PASTORAL NOTE FOR THE LEADER (STANDING NOTE, EVERY SESSION)

No one is ever asked to name their battle; sharing questions stay general. Restate confidentiality if anyone new is present. Where a stronghold involves addiction, compulsion, or harm to self or others, walk the person warmly toward Confession, a pastor or spiritual director, and appropriate professional help; grace and good medicine are allies. Tonight’s verse 12 teaching (“not against flesh and blood”) must never be used to minimize real harm done by real people or to pressure premature reconciliation; naming the true enemy does not acquit human wrongdoing, and prudent boundaries can themselves be armor.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

*Lord God of hosts, you saw that there was no man to save us, so you armed yourself and came down.
Tonight, open the doors of your armory to us.
Strengthen us in the strength of your might, clothe us in what you yourself have worn,
and teach our hands the one sword you issue.
Through Christ our Lord, the Stronger One. Amen.*

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What is a piece of equipment (work boots, an apron, a helmet, a uniform) that changes how you carry yourself the moment you put it on? What does it do to you?
2. If you had to walk out the door tomorrow into the hardest day of your year, what would you want on you (not with you: on you)?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

Read Ephesians 6:10-13 aloud.

3. Look closely at verse 10: “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.” Whose strength is it, and how does a person come by it? What does that already tell us about the armor before we see a single piece?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It is the Lord’s strength, and the verb is closer to “be strengthened”: received, not mustered. Nobody in this passage is told to be strong in himself; after three weeks inside the anatomy of our weakness, that is not an insult but a relief. And it frames the whole inventory: this is the armor “of God” because God supplies it. We do not forge this kit; we are issued it. The requisition line appears in verse 18, and we will not let it be a footnote.

4. Verse 12 names our enemies, and just as importantly, it un-names one. Who is not on the list? Say it carefully: what does “we are not contending against flesh and blood” mean for the human faces attached to your wall?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

No human being is on the list. The coworker, the ex, the parent whose sentence became your wall: none of them is the power this war is against; the enemy is “the spiritual hosts of wickedness.” That does not erase their agency: real people did real wrongs and answer for them, and justice may rightly be sought. But years of misdirected fire (resentment, fantasy arguments, revenge rehearsals) have been aimed where this war cannot be won.

Two careful edges, said aloud: this does not acquit anyone of real harm, and it does not oblige anyone to unsafe reunion; boundaries can be armor. What it does is free your fight and forbid hatred: the enemy loves nothing more than watching the people he tempts turn all their fire on one

another.

Read Ephesians 6:14-17 aloud.

5. Take the inventory piece by piece and match each one to the war we have already mapped: the fog, the accusation, the restlessness, the burning sentences, the despair. What does each piece answer?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The belt of truth answers the fog (“Did God say...?”): everything else hangs on it, exactly as the serpent knew. The breastplate of righteousness guards the heart against accusation and shame, the enemy’s standing policy since Eden; how a baptized sinner who has lost his footing is restored to grace is next week’s whole session. Feet shod with the gospel of peace give a soldier footing: peace as traction for standing, not a hammock. The shield of faith “can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one”: the darts include the burning sentences (you are worthless, God is holding out, nothing will change), and the shield is not certainty but trust in the Father the sentences slander. The helmet of salvation guards the mind, the battlefield of Session 6.

And then the one named weapon: “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” We have already watched this sword drawn three times in the wilderness, from memory. In the war for consent, where the enemy’s weapon is the lie, the named weapon issued is the truth. The arsenal makes perfect sense once you know the enemy.

DISCOVERY MOMENT (THE HEART OF THE NIGHT)

Say: Paul is not the first biblical writer to name a breastplate of righteousness and a helmet of salvation. Centuries earlier, a prophet watched someone put those two pieces on. Send the group to Isaiah 59 to find who the wearer is and why he arms (they are looking for verses 16-17); let them say the answer before you do.

Have it read aloud: finding no one to intervene, “his own arm brought him victory. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head.” Then ask the question the whole study has been waiting for: if these are God’s own pieces, what are we being issued in Ephesians 6? Let them say it: the Church wears her Champion’s kit. He fought in it first; it has never lost. (Hunters who keep going can find the Messiah girded in righteousness and faithfulness in Isaiah 11:5, and the herald’s shod feet in Isaiah 52:7.)

Now resolve the thread from Session 1, honest about what each text contributes. Luke 11:22 says the Stronger One “takes away his armor in which he trusted”, without naming the armor. Session 3 inventoried his Eden arsenal and found sentences. Colossians 2:15 says the principalities were disarmed at the cross. The study’s synthesis, ours to teach as a synthesis: his trusted armor is best read as the lie, and at the cross it failed him. Tonight the exchange is complete: his armor taken; our armor, truth, issued, and its heart is the Victor’s own.

Read Ephesians 6:18 aloud.

6. Verse 18 comes after the sword, and most readers treat it as the passage winding down. Read it again as part of the armor: what is prayer’s actual role in the kit?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It is the supply line. “Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication”: the whole kit is worn praying, because prayer is how issued equipment gets drawn and kept in use, together with the sacraments next session opens. St. Alphonsus’s blunt axiom belongs here: the one who prays is saved, and the one who does not pray is lost, for God ordinarily grants his help through our asking (prayer itself being his gift); so the enemy’s first objective in any siege is to talk the garrison out of praying. If your prayer has quietly died in the exact season your wall has quietly grown, that is not a coincidence; it is strategy: his. “Prayer is a battle” (CCC 2725), and it is the one battle that funds all the others.

Build, Then Press: The Lone Soldier

BUILD THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

A self-reliant friend says: “This is why my faith is private. Me, my Bible, my prayers: that is the whole armor right there, and I can wear it alone on a trail on Sunday morning better than in a pew. Organized religion adds nothing to Ephesians 6; if anything, church people have fired more darts at me than the devil ever did. The soldier keeps his own kit.”

Give it its due: the armor is personally worn, private prayer is irreplaceable, and the wounds from church people are often real.

7. Now press. Share two facts from your prep (Paul’s commands here are grammatically plural; the shield he names is the great door-shaped shield built for formation use), then look together at what verse 18 says prayer is for. Is this the equipment of a lone soldier?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Every command in the passage is plural: Paul is addressing a body, arming a unit, not a hermit. The great shield he names (the *thureos*, the door-shaped shield) belonged to formation warfare: such shields could be overlapped with the shields beside them, and a soldier who wandered off alone turned his best equipment into a plank. And verse 18’s prayer is aimed outward: “with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints”: the armored man’s first assignment is intercession for the soldiers next to him.

Grant the wounds; they are real, and verse 12 refuses both to excuse the human hands and to mistake them for the final enemy. But the conclusion runs the other way: an enemy whose pattern (St. Ignatius of Loyola’s discernment rules on secrecy and weak points, Session 3) is to isolate before he strikes is delighted by lone-soldier Christianity; and the armor itself is distributed through a Church, as next session’s sacraments make unmistakable. The armor is personal; the army is not optional. Shields overlap or shields fail.

DIG DEEPER (IF TIME ALLOWS)

Romans 13:12-14: “let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light... put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” The armor, worn, invites us to see a Person put on: which is exactly what the Lorica prays.

1 Thessalonians 5:8: the breastplate reappears as “faith and love,” the helmet as “the hope of salvation.” The kit is consistent across Paul, and hope guards the head: despair is a head wound.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT

8. Which piece of the kit have you left on the bench: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word, prayer? (St. John Chrysostom would ask it this way: where is your unguarded spot, and does your enemy know it better than you do?)

9. Who fights next to you? If the honest answer is “no one,” what would it cost you this week to lock shields with one other person: this group, a friend, a men’s or women’s group, an accountability partner?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- **Suit up daily.** Each morning, pray the armor on, piece by piece, in your own words, thirty seconds: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word, ending with your Session 3 countersword verse: the sword goes in the hand, not the scabbard.
- **Learn the Lorica.** Pray the heart of St. Patrick’s Breastplate (“Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me...”) once a day this week, slowly. By Sunday, own it from memory.
- **Fund the supply line.** Identify the hour your prayer usually dies (the tired hour, the phone hour) and put five minutes of supplication there, including by name one person who fights beside you, “making supplication for all the saints.”
- **Bring your sealed sheet next week.** Next session, the Wall opens: alone, in silence, before the Lord.

CLOSING PRAYER

*Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise.*

Lord Jesus, Stronger One: we take the whole armor of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

Ephesians 6:11

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 4, in order:

1. Ephesians 6:10-13 (main reading: be strengthened; not against flesh and blood)
2. Ephesians 6:14-17 (main reading: the inventory)
3. Isaiah 59:16-17 (Discovery Moment: God arms himself; breastplate and helmet)
4. Isaiah 11:5; 52:7 (secondary finds: the Messiah's belt; the herald's feet)
5. Luke 11:22 and Colossians 2:15 (thread resolution: his armor stripped)
6. Ephesians 6:18 (prayer as supply line)
7. Romans 13:12-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:8 (Dig Deeper: armor of light; hope as helmet)
8. Ephesians 6:11 (memory verse)

Session 5: The Demolition Charges

John 20:19-23 · John 6:53-58 · The Wall opens tonight

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the “divine power to destroy strongholds” of 2 Corinthians 10:4 has street addresses: the confessional and the altar. Confession is the demolition charge set against the wall itself; the Eucharist is the Stronger One moving in, the standing answer to the swept house; and the baptismal renunciations are the soldier’s own voice joining the siege. Tonight the sealed sheets open, alone, before the Lord.

Catholic Touchstone. The sacrament of Penance restores us to God’s grace and friendship (CCC 1468); the Eucharist wipes away venial sin and preserves us from future mortal sins (CCC 1394-1395); the renunciation of Satan belongs to the baptismal rite itself (CCC 1237).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Everything the study has built converges tonight. Session 1 promised weapons with divine power; Sessions 2 and 3 mapped the wall and its architect; Session 4 issued the armor and left one question deliberately open: where does a sinner actually get the breastplate of righteousness? Tonight answers with the Church’s glorious lack of subtlety: at the confessional, from Christ, free.

Ground Confession in John 20:19-23, and keep the scene concrete: the risen Jesus, wounds still visible, breathes on men (a deliberate echo of God breathing life into Adam, Genesis 2:7; Ezekiel 37’s breath on the slain stands between) and says: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” Whatever a participant’s history with the sacrament, make them deal with the verse: Jesus deliberately routed forgiveness through human beings he authorized. Why he might do that for creatures like us is the pastoral heart of the night: strongholds are embodied things (built by eyes, hands, habits, hours), and Christ demolishes them in an embodied way: your own voice naming the thing in the dark, and a voice with his authority answering out loud: absolved. The wondering ends in the ear, not the imagination. People leave the box knowing the way you know a door has shut.

Say the hard, honest thing about grave sin plainly and briefly: a stronghold’s acts can be grave matter, and mortal sin (grave matter with full knowledge and deliberate consent) is ordinarily remitted in sacramental Confession, which one conscious of mortal sin seeks before Communion; perfect contrition, joined to the resolve to confess, reconciles even before the sacrament (CCC 1452, 1457). Go quickly, and do not let shame set the schedule. This study deliberately does not re-teach the full doctrine of mortal and venial sin; our catalog’s study Hold Fast covers it at length, and your reference card points there. Tonight’s register is invitation, not audit: the confessional is a field hospital with the lights on all night.

Then the Eucharist, and here the swept-house thread finally resolves. Jesus’s repeated, intensified language in John 6 grounds the Church’s realist reading, held with the Last Supper and apostolic tradition: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (6:56). Abides: the occupancy verb. In the study’s house-image (an analogy we teach as ours): the house Luke shows swept,

and Matthew calls empty, is not left vacant; Christ, who already dwells in the baptized in grace, deepens and renews his indwelling from the altar. The Catechism's claims are startlingly practical for our study: this food strengthens charity, wipes away venial sins, and "preserves us from future mortal sins" (CCC 1394-1395). For a room full of people fortifying against relapse, that is not devotional garnish; that is the garrison.

Third movement: the renunciations. In the Church's ordinary rite of Baptism your people, or their parents and godparents for them, spoke one of her most ancient battle-speeches, renewed liturgically at Easter: "Do you renounce Satan? And all his works? And all his empty promises?" (wording varies slightly by ritual book; check your parish missal). Tonight they learn to use it as a personal weapon in the first person: "In the name of Jesus, I renounce the lie that..." This is resistance language, fully theirs by baptism (Session 3's guardrail stands: renounce, never command). And it is the hinge of the Wall liturgy at session's end.

The Wall opens tonight. Run it exactly as scripted in the Discussion Guide: unhurried silence, each person alone with their own sealed sentence, no sharing, no collection, no debrief. The sheet was written in Session 1, before the study taught them anything; many will discover their wall now has a name, an anatomy, and an architect they can identify, which is itself the evidence of grace at work these past weeks. The liturgy moves from reading, to renunciation, to resolve: and the resolve you commend is bringing the sentence (not the paper) to Confession soon. Have local confession times printed or on the parish site, and if possible, arrange with Father for the sacrament to be available within the week and say so tonight.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

2 Kings 5:1-14 (Naaman). The great commander with the incurable affliction, sent to wash seven times in the muddy Jordan, is the Old Testament's definitive study in the scandal of humble means: "Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" He wanted a dramatic cure proportional to his dignity; God offered a bath. His servants' question ("if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?") is aimed straight at every Catholic who finds the confessional too small a door for their particular wall. Central discovery; do not name it in advance.

Psalms 107:13-16. The psalm of the freed prisoners: "he shatters the doors of bronze, and cuts in two the bars of iron." Prisoners who "sat in darkness and in gloom" cry to the LORD, and the hardware itself fails. This is the night's epigraph and its second discovery: the demolition is his.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Vianney

The Curé of Ars, from his catechetical instructions and the witness of his life

The patron of parish priests spent long hours, day after day, in the confessional, and taught, in substance, that the sinner's misery is the very title by which he may approach the good God; that beside God's mercy our sin is as a grain of sand beside a torrent; and that souls stay chained for years to sins one honest confession would have struck off. Pilgrims came from across France to a box in an obscure village, because inside it they met not Jean Vianney but Jesus Christ.

For our purposes: few confessors in history watched more walls come down, and his testimony stands: Christ truly absolves in a valid confession received with contrition and purpose of

amendment. The wall's best defense is keeping you out of the box.

Presented as a summary of his well-attested teaching and practice; the compressions are ours (his attested images include mercy as a torrent and sin as a grain of sand).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Ignatius of Antioch

Letter to the Ephesians (ch. 20), written on the road to martyrdom in the early second century (traditionally c. 107)

Writing in chains to the church at Ephesus, the apostolic father St. Ignatius calls the one bread of the Eucharist “the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death” (as commonly rendered in English). A bishop formed in the apostolic age, traveling under sentence of martyrdom, names the Eucharist not as a symbol of survival but as the thing itself: the food that undoes dying.

For our purposes: if the Eucharist is medicine against death, it is medicine against every lesser death first, including the slow one a stronghold deals. The Church's oldest voices already talked about the altar the way this study talks about the war.

The quoted phrase is his, in the standard English rendering of the letter.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Mystagogical Catecheses (Lecture 1, to the newly baptized)

St. Cyril reminds the newly baptized of the night they were baptized: how they faced the west, the region of darkness, stretched out a hand, and renounced Satan to his face “as though he were present,” breaking, Cyril says in substance, every covenant with him; and then turned bodily to the east, toward the light, to profess Christ. The renunciation was not a formality; it was a treaty publicly torn up, and the turning of the body preached the turning of the life.

For our purposes: tonight's renunciation is not a novelty this study invented; it is your own baptism, unsheathed. Some in the room will renounce a specific lie tonight with their sealed sheet in hand. Cyril would recognize the scene exactly.

Presented as a summary of Lecture 1. The Mystagogical Catecheses are transmitted under St. Cyril's name, though some scholars attribute their final form to his successor John; the rite they describe is in any case the Church's own.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1468.** “The whole power of the sacrament of Penance consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship.” Demolition is not the deepest description of what happens in the box; reunion is. The wall comes down because the embrace goes up.
- **CCC 1394-1395.** The Eucharist strengthens charity, and that living charity “wipes away venial sins”; and by deepening our life in Christ it “preserves us from future mortal sins.” The garrison sacrament, in the Church's own words.
- **CCC 1237.** Baptism's rite includes the explicit renunciation of Satan, spoken by the candidate or, for an infant, by parents and godparents: initiation into Christ begins with resigning, out loud, from the other army.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

THE SWEEPED HOUSE (RESOLVES TONIGHT, completed next week). Luke 11:24-26 (with Matthew

12:44's "empty") warned in week one that vacancy invites reoccupation. Tonight the Eucharist answers: "abides in me, and I in him." In the study's image, the house is occupied by the Stronger One in person. Name the resolution when John 6:56 lands. Session 6 completes it: an occupied house still needs furnishing (the renewed mind, the opposing virtues).

THE LIAR'S VOICE (develops). Expect the voice to be loudest tonight, in the pews before Confession is even mentioned: "you, in a confessional? after this long? he knows what you did." Name the pattern for the group before the Wall liturgy: the same enemy who whispered "it is no big deal" before the sin whispers "it is unforgivable" after. The switch is his tell. Final naming comes in the final session: Session 8.

THE ARMOR (resolved last week, deployed tonight). If someone connects the breastplate of righteousness to absolution, celebrate it: that is the study working.

THE WALL (OPENS TONIGHT). Follow the script. Protect the silence. Collect nothing. Afterward, do not ask anyone what they wrote, tonight or ever.

SESSION GOALS

1. Establish from John 20:19-23 that Christ deliberately routed forgiveness through authorized men, and why embodied absolution answers an embodied wall.
2. Deliver the Naaman discovery: the scandal of humble means, and pride as a load-bearing beam in many walls.
3. Resolve the swept-house thread: the Eucharist as occupancy ("abides"), with CCC 1394-1395's practical promises.
4. Restore the baptismal renunciation to the group as a personal, first-person weapon.
5. Conduct the Wall liturgy with unhurried reverence: read, renounce, resolve.
6. Send everyone toward actual confession times this week, with warmth and zero coercion.

TIMED PLAN (90 MINUTES)

- Welcome, covenant, opening prayer (Psalm 107 epigraph): 8 min

Load note: tonight carries the study's heaviest freight. If discussion runs long, the John 6 movement (question 5) may be carried over to open Session 6, where the swept-house thread completes anyway; never trim the Wall's silence to save it.

- Win questions: 8 min
- Build: John 20:19-23 and the steelman (straight to God?): 22 min
- Discovery Moment: Naaman (2 Kings 5): 12 min
- Build: John 6:53-58, the occupancy, thread resolution: 15 min
- The renunciation teaching, then the Wall liturgy and closing: 25 min

If time runs short: cut the Dig Deeper box and trim Win to one question. Never trim the Wall liturgy; if the night runs long, end late. This is the evening the study was built around.

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

No one is ever asked to name their battle. Restate confidentiality before the Wall liturgy. Where a stronghold involves addiction, compulsion, or harm to self or others, tonight is the natural night to

repeat, warmly and to the whole room, that Confession, spiritual direction, and professional help are allies of grace, not rivals or substitutes for one another.

Confession practicalities: have this week's local confession times printed. If any participant is anxious about the sacrament after years away, offer (to the whole group, so no one is singled out) a simple walkthrough card and the sentence that unlocks the box: "Father, it has been a long time, and I need help making this confession." No priest worthy of the collar hears that sentence as anything but good news.

During the Wall liturgy: lights stay on, door stays open, you remain visibly present and praying, not circulating or watching faces. If someone is in tears, do not intrude or demand disclosure; afterward, a quiet consent-based check ("would you like a minute, or a hand?") honors both grace and safety.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

"Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress... for he shatters the doors of bronze, and cuts in two the bars of iron." (Psalm 107:13, 16)
Lord Jesus Christ, tonight we bring you the wall itself.
You have shown us its anatomy, its architect, and the armor for the fight;
now bring us to the weapons only you could forge: your mercy, your Body, your name on our lips.
Amen.

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Tell us about a time a professional fixed in minutes something you had fought for months (a mechanic, a doctor, a plumber). What did it feel like to finally hand it over?
2. Why do you think we will happily attempt "some great thing" to fix ourselves (programs, resolutions, reinventions) before we will do a small, humble thing that actually works?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

Read John 20:19-23 aloud.

3. Watch the risen Jesus's actions in order: peace given, wounds shown, peace and sending repeated, and then he breathes on them with a word. What older scene does a divine breathing on man recall, and what does Jesus attach to this breathing?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Genesis 2:7: God breathed life into the first man. John's scene deliberately echoes it (Ezekiel 37's breath on the slain stands between), and it marks a new creation. And what the new breath carries is startling: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Among the risen Christ's first gifts to his assembled Church is the authority to forgive sins, deliberately routed through authorized men. Whatever we make of it, the routing is his idea, not the medieval Church's. The question worth sitting in is not whether he did this, but why: and the answer has everything to do with what walls are made of.

Build, Then Press: Straight to God

BUILD THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

A sincere friend says: "I confess straight to God. David did: he sinned catastrophically and prayed Psalm 51 to God alone, and 'there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Timothy 2:5). A man in a box cannot forgive sins; only God can. And bread, however blessed, cannot fight an addiction. This externalized machinery is exactly the ritual religion Jesus criticized: God wants the heart." (Two objections live in that speech, one against Confession and one against the Eucharist; take them in turn, the second with question 5.)

Honor its strength: it protects God's sole prerogative, it prizes interior conversion, and it quotes

Scripture accurately.

4. Now press: hold the objection up against John 20:22-23, James 5:16, and what we know (from Session 2) about how strongholds are actually built. What is the objection missing?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

Grant everything true: only God forgives sin; contrition straight to God is precious and, for venial sin, genuinely effective; and the heart is the point. But John 20 is Jesus, not machinery: the one mediator himself chose to exercise his mediation through men he breathed on and sent, which is why the priest in the box acts in the person of Christ; going to Confession is going straight to God, by the route God built. “Confess your sins to one another” (James 5:16) sat inside a fuller apostolic practice: the verses just before it summon the presbyters of the Church, whose prayer and anointing carry forgiveness of sins (James 5:14-16). And even David’s Psalm 51 ran through Nathan: God’s pardon reached him by an embodied, sent word (2 Samuel 12).

And consider what the route does to a wall. Strongholds are embodied: built by eyes, hands, habits, hours, and defended above all by secrecy (St. Ignatius’s false lover, Session 3). Absolution is embodied demolition: your own voice drags the lie into daylight, breaking its favorite defense, and Christ’s voice answers through the priest, out loud, in your ears: absolved. No more wondering whether the feeling counted: the assurance is objective, whatever feelings do next. (The scrupulous should lean on that objectivity with a regular confessor’s guidance rather than re-confessing against it.) A wall built in the body is torn down in the body. That is not externalism; that is incarnation.

DISCOVERY MOMENT (THE SCANDAL OF HUMBLE MEANS)

Say: the Old Testament tells the story of a great man, a decorated commander, with an affliction all his power could not touch, who nearly refused his cure because it was too humble for him. Send the group to 2 Kings 5 and let them find the story (verses 1-14) and, specifically, the two sentences that sting: his protest, and his servants’ question.

Have both read aloud: “Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?” and “if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?” Then ask the room to translate the servants’ question into tonight’s terms, and let the silence do its work: we would attempt some great thing (the program, the pilgrimage, the total reinvention) sooner than kneel in a box and say the sentence. Why? Because the great thing leaves our dignity armed, and the humble thing disarms it: and pride is a load-bearing beam in many a wall. Naaman washed, “and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child.” The Jordan was muddy, and it worked.

Read John 6:53-58 aloud.

5. In week one, Jesus warned us about the swept house (Matthew’s parallel calls it “empty”). Listen again to verse 56 with that house in mind. How does Jesus describe the relationship his flesh and blood create, and which of his words answers the swept-house warning?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

Abides. The swept house’s fatal flaw was vacancy; the Eucharist’s promise is mutual indwelling: not

a visit, an occupancy. The Stronger One does not merely evict the strong man; he moves in. This resolves the warning that has hung over the study since Session 1: the goal was never a clean, empty house, and now we know how it is filled: Christ already dwells in the baptized in grace, and from the altar that indwelling is renewed, deepened, and defended, as often as we come. (The house-image is our analogy; the abiding is his promise.)

And hear how practical the Church is about it: this food strengthens charity, wipes away venial sins, and “preserves us from future mortal sins” (CCC 1394-1395). For anyone fortifying against relapse, frequent Communion is not extra credit; it is the garrison taking up residence. St. Ignatius of Antioch called it the medicine of immortality in the early second century; the prescription has not changed.

6. At Baptism the Church had us, or our godparents for us, renounce Satan out loud, and the promise is renewed each Easter. Why is renouncing, rather than commanding, exactly the right weapon for the baptized, and exactly the right size? (Only after they wrestle with it, introduce tonight’s practice: saying it in the first person, at the wall: “In the name of Jesus, I renounce the lie that...”)

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

Because it is ours by baptism. Session 3 drew the line: commanding spirits belongs to the sent (and solemn exorcism to a priest with his bishop’s mandate); renouncing belongs to every baptized Christian: a personal adaptation of our baptismal promises, unsheathed and aimed. St. Cyril of Jerusalem describes the newly baptized facing the west, the region of darkness, and renouncing Satan “as though he were present”: a treaty publicly torn up. When you renounce the specific lie under your specific wall, in Jesus’s name, you are not picking a duel; you are resigning, again and by name, from the other army, and taking your own voice back from the propagandist. Resist and renounce; never converse, never command. It is the right size because it is aimed at the weapon he uses in the war this study fights: your consent to the lie.

DIG DEEPER (IF TIME ALLOWS)

Psalm 107:10-16 in full: the prisoners “in darkness and in gloom” sat in “irons” their own rebellion forged (v. 11 with Session 2’s Proverbs 5:22), cried out, and watched the hardware fail: doors of bronze shattered, bars of iron cut. The psalm is tonight’s whole liturgy in six verses.

For the full Catholic teaching on mortal and venial sin, examination of conscience, and returning after grave sin, see the Catholic Armory study Hold Fast; tonight deliberately keeps its register on invitation rather than instruction.

THE WALL: GUIDED PRAYER (SCRIPT FOR THE LEADER; A STUDY DEVOTION, NOT AN OFFICIAL RITE)

RUN THIS UNHURRIED; PROTECT THE SILENCE

1. SETTLE. Say: “Take out your sealed sheet. In week one you named, in one sentence, the wall you most wanted down. No one has read it; no one ever will. Tonight you open it alone, before the Lord.”
2. READ (3-4 minutes, silence). Say: “Open it. Read your own sentence slowly. In Session 1 you named this wall without knowing its anatomy, its architect, or your armor. Read it again as the

person you are now. Notice what God has already changed: in the wall, or in you.”

3. RENOUNCE (2 minutes, silence). Say: “Under every wall is a lie. Silently, in your own words, renounce it by name: In the name of Jesus, I renounce the lie that... Then, if you are ready, hand the wall itself over: Jesus, Stronger One, this wall is yours. Bring it down in your time, by your power.”

4. RESOLVE (1 minute). Say: “The sheet is yours: keep it sealed as a marker, or tear it up this week as an act of hope. But the sentence on it deserves better than paper. This week, bring to Confession your own sins connected with this wall, if there are any; some walls are wounds, not sins, and wounds are not confessed but entrusted: to the Lord, and where needed to a director’s or professional’s care. Times are printed on the card. You will not be asked about it here, ever.”

5. CLOSE with the prayer below. Do not debrief the silence; let it ride home with them.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT

7. Naaman’s servants asked him: “if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?” What is the “great thing” you have been willing to attempt against your wall, and what is the humble thing you have been avoiding?

8. If the Eucharist really is the Stronger One taking up residence (“abides in me, and I in him”), what would change about how, and how often, you approach the altar?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- **Go.** Bring your own sins connected with the wall, if any, to Confession this week; wounds are not sins, and are entrusted rather than confessed. If it has been years, open with: “Father, it has been a long time, and I need help making this confession.” That sentence has never once been bad news to a priest.
- **Receive on purpose.** If you are Catholic and properly disposed (Confession first if conscious of mortal sin: see “Go”), receive Communion this week with one silent word: “Abide.” If you cannot receive, make a spiritual communion from the pew; the desire itself is prayer. Let the Amen mean: the house is yours.
- **Optional fast.** Pick one day and fast in some real, modest way, joined to your renunciation: fasting is prayer’s oldest companion in this fight.
- **Renounce at the gate.** This week, when the old suggestion arrives (Session 2 taught you where), answer it once, out loud if you can: “In the name of Jesus, I renounce the lie that ____.” Then your countersword verse. Gate, renunciation, sword: thirty seconds.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Stronger One: tonight we opened the wall and read its name, and you were not surprised.

*We renounce, again, Satan, and all his works, and all his empty promises,
and the particular lie each of us has carried folded in our hands.*

Shatter the doors of bronze. Cut the bars of iron. And then, Lord: abide.

Our Father...

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 1:9

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 5, in order:

1. Psalm 107:13, 16 (opening prayer epigraph); Psalm 107:10-16 (Dig Deeper: doors of bronze, bars of iron)
2. John 20:19-23 (main reading: the breath, the authority to forgive)
3. Psalm 51 and 1 Timothy 2:5 (steelman: straight to God; one mediator)
4. James 5:14-16 (steelman answer: presbyters, anointing, mutual confession)
5. Genesis 2:7 (question 3: the Eden breath); Proverbs 5:22 (Dig Deeper cross-reference)
6. 2 Kings 5:1-14 (Discovery Moment: Naaman and the scandal of humble means)
7. John 6:53-58 (main reading: abides; the occupancy)
8. Luke 11:24-26 (thread resolved: the swept house answered)
9. 1 John 1:9 (memory verse; v. 8 as context if needed)
10. For mortal/venial sin in full: see the Catholic Armory study Hold Fast

Session 6: The Battle of the Mind

Romans 12:1-2 · Philippians 4:4-9

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the daily tactics of the renewed mind: how thoughts are actually “taken captive” (by redirection to Christ, not by wrestling matches), how the opposing virtue starves a vice, and how the escape route promised in 1 Corinthians 10:13 is found in practice. The swept-house thread completes: the occupied house gets furnished.

Catholic Touchstone. “There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle” (CCC 2015); human virtues acquired by education, deliberate acts, and a perseverance ever-renewed in repeated efforts, purified and elevated by grace (CCC 1810-1811); the battle for purity of heart and vision (CCC 2520).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

If Session 5 was the artillery night, tonight is infantry doctrine: the unglamorous daily fight in the six inches between a Christian’s ears. Paul’s command is total: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:2). But note verse 1 first: the renewal of the mind begins with the presenting of the body (“present your bodies as a living sacrifice”). Paul is no gnostic; the mind is renewed by a body that shows up: at Mass, at the examen, at the gate. Habits of the body train the weather of the mind, which the group already knows from Session 2’s machinery, now running in reverse.

Teach the tradition’s actual technique for hostile thoughts, because most Christians have never been shown one and default to a losing move: the frontal wrestling match, hours spent arguing with the thought, which feeds it attention (its favorite food). The tradition’s counsel is different and almost suspiciously simple. St. Benedict teaches, in substance (Rule ch. 4): when wrongful thoughts come into the heart, dash them against Christ, at once, and disclose them to a spiritual father. Not: analyze them, debate them, measure them; dash them (like glass against rock, as we put it) by turning immediately to Christ with a short prayer, and tell someone (secrecy again: Session 3). The Eastern tradition calls the underlying watchfulness *nepsis*, sobriety of mind: the watchman noticing the thought at the gate (the desert tradition, East and West; Cassian, Session 2) and handing it to Christ before it is inside negotiating.

Second technique: replacement. Paul does not say “stop thinking about what is false”; he says “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just... think about these things” (Philippians 4:8). The mind abhors a vacuum precisely the way the swept house did; you do not empty a mind of a lie, you crowd it out with truth. This is also the logic of the opposing virtue: the tradition’s standing prescription that a vice is starved by deliberately practicing its contrary (the resentful man prays blessings on his rival by name; the glutton fasts small and kindly; the vain man hides one good deed). The machinery of Session 2 (repetition forms inclination) is now conscripted: every deliberate contrary act lays a course of the counter-wall. St. Thomas teaches (ST I-II, the treatise on habits) that repeated acts form habits in both directions, toward vice or toward virtue; tonight the group starts building with that law.

Third: the escape route. 1 Corinthians 10:13 is the study's central discovery tonight, and handle it with precision, because it is both gold and (misread) cruel. The promise is not "you will never be overwhelmed" but: God is faithful, the temptation is common to man (not your unique monstrosity), and "with the temptation" God "will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." The way of escape is provided with the temptation, in the same delivery: sometimes a findable, humble exit (the door, the phone call, the short prayer, the next right task), and sometimes the strength to endure faithfully where no door appears; both are the promise kept. Many people in recovery have found this verse a lifeline; teach the group to look for the exit sign, and to trust the promise even when the exit is endurance.

A quiet word on scrupulosity, because the mind-battle sessions of any study like this can be misheard by an anxious conscience as a command to monitor every mental flicker. The Church's tradition is against that: temptation is not sin (St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life, Part IV; Session 3), the arriving thought is not consent (Session 2), and obsessive thought-policing is the enemy's counterfeit of *nepsis*: it aims attention at the self in fear, where watchfulness aims it at Christ in trust. Tonight's steelman handles the modern version of this concern head-on. If you know a participant struggles with scrupulosity or OCD, the standing pastoral note applies doubly: confessor and counselor, allied.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Proverbs 4:23. "Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life." The Old Testament's one-sentence doctrine of *nepsis*: the heart is the wellhead, so post the guard there, not downstream at the behavior. Quick discovery early in the night.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13 in its Exodus frame. Paul builds the escape-route promise on Israel's wilderness: the same generation, the same testings, "written down for our instruction." The study's Exodus thread (finger of God, Session 1; Deuteronomy swords, Session 3) continues: the wilderness is where God trains freed slaves not to think like slaves. Central discovery; do not name the verse in advance.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Benedict of Nursia

The Rule, ch. 4 (the instruments of good works)

St. Benedict instructs his monks, in substance: as soon as wrongful thoughts come into your heart, dash them against Christ, and disclose them to a spiritual father. Two moves, immediate and humble: the thought is not entertained, debated, or measured, but broken at once against the Rock; and it is told. Elsewhere, the Rule as a whole situates this counsel within a structured life of prayer, work, reading, and stability: scaffolding that makes the quick dash possible.

For our purposes (the military gloss is ours): a disclosed thought loses its garrison, dashed against Christ it breaks on the Rock (1 Corinthians 10:4), and a patron of Europe left the West a Rule that shaped its monasticism on two verbs: dash and tell. Your group can learn both this week.

The dash-and-disclose counsel is a close summary of Rule ch. 4; the surrounding structure is drawn from the Rule as a whole. Wording varies by translation.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Climacus

The Ladder of Divine Ascent

St. John of the Ladder teaches, in substance, that the fight with a thought is easiest at its first appearance and grows harder with every second of hospitality: what begins as a suggestion becomes a conversation, then a coupling of the mind with the thing, then captivity. He counsels meeting the very first movement with the name of Jesus and refusing the conversation entirely. As we would put it: no one has ever lost a debate he declined to attend.

For our purposes: this is Session 2's gate doctrine matured into a technique: the moment of cheapest victory is the first moment, and the weapon of that moment is a short prayer, not a long argument.

Presented as a summary of his teaching on thoughts in the Ladder; not a direct quotation.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Story of a Soul (the Little Way)

St. Thérèse teaches, in substance, that holiness for most souls is built not of great austerities but of small, deliberate acts of love done at once and with a smile: the irritating sister sought out rather than avoided, the small comfort surrendered without announcement, the failure met not with dramatic self-reproach but with the confidence of a child who gets up and runs again to her Father. Her way makes littleness mighty.

For our purposes: the opposing virtue is not a heroic program; it is the next small contrary act, done now, for love. Thérèse makes tonight's doctrine liveable by Tuesday.

Presented as a summary of her spirituality as she describes it; not a direct quotation.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 2015.** "The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle." The Church puts tonight's fight at the center of every saint's road, not at its margins.
- **CCC 1810-1811.** Human virtues are acquired by education, deliberate acts, and perseverance ever renewed in repeated efforts, and are purified and elevated by grace; and the Catechism adds, with disarming honesty, that it is not easy for man, wounded by sin, to maintain moral balance. Deliberate repetition, under grace: the counter-wall's building code.
- **CCC 2520.** Baptism confers the grace of purification from all sins; the baptized then continue the battle for purity of heart by the virtue and gift of chastity, purity of intention, purity of vision (external and internal, with "discipline of feelings and imagination"), and prayer. The Church's own tactics sheet for one whole family of strongholds.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

THE SWEEPED HOUSE (COMPLETES TONIGHT). Session 5 occupied the house (the Eucharist: "abides"); tonight furnishes it: the renewed mind, the practiced virtues, Philippians 4:8 hung on every wall. When you close, name the full arc: swept (warning, Session 1), occupied (Session 5), furnished (tonight). The house is no longer an advertisement; it is a garrison home.

THE LIAR'S VOICE (develops). Tonight's techniques are all counter-battery against the voice: dash, decline the debate, replace, escape. One session remains before it is named and answered for good.

THE WALL (aftermath week). Some of your group went to Confession this week; some did not and feel it. Say nothing that sorts the room. If someone volunteers joy, receive it warmly and briefly; if the group is quiet, trust the work to God. The standing rule holds: never ask.

SESSION GOALS

1. Ground the renewed mind in the presented body (Romans 12:1-2): the mind is renewed by a body that shows up.
2. Teach the two verbs of the tradition's technique: dash (redirect to Christ at first appearance) and tell (disclosure).
3. Teach replacement over suppression: Philippians 4:8 and the opposing virtue, with Session 2's machinery running in reverse.
4. Deliver the escape-route discovery (1 Corinthians 10:13) with precision: common to man, faithful God, exit provided with the temptation.
5. Guard the scrupulous: watchfulness aims at Christ in trust, not at the self in fear.
6. Complete the swept-house arc: occupied last week, furnished tonight.

TIMED PLAN (90 MINUTES)

- Welcome, covenant, opening prayer: 8 min
- Win questions: 10 min
- Build: Romans 12:1-2 and Proverbs 4:23: 18 min
- Build: the techniques (dash and tell; replacement; opposing virtue): 20 min
- Discovery Moment: 1 Corinthians 10:13 and the steelman: 20 min
- Send, Live It, closing: 14 min

If time runs short: cut the Dig Deeper box and take one Win question. Do not cut the scrupulosity guard inside the steelman answer; for at least one person in your room it is the difference between medicine and poison.

PASTORAL NOTE FOR THE LEADER (STANDING NOTE, EVERY SESSION)

No one is ever asked to name their battle; never ask who did or did not go to Confession after Session 5. Where a stronghold involves addiction, compulsion, or harm to self or others, keep walking the person toward Confession, spiritual direction, and professional help as allies. Tonight specifically: if intrusive, unwanted thoughts are a source of terror for someone (as distinct from temptations they are drawn toward), that pattern deserves a confessor's and often a clinician's care together, and the techniques of this session should be given to such a person by their confessor, not by a worksheet.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Father, you have occupied the house; now furnish it.

Take our minds tonight: the wandering thoughts, the worn grooves, the arguments we lose by attending.

*Teach us to dash every liar against the Rock,
and fill the rooms with whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and gracious.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What is a song you cannot get out of your head right now? What finally dislodges an earworm: silence, or another song?
2. Think of a room in your home that stayed empty for a while after you moved in. What happened to it? What finally made it a real room?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

Read Romans 12:1-2 aloud.

3. Verse 2 commands the renewal of the mind, but verse 1 comes first: “present your bodies as a living sacrifice.” Why would the battle for the mind begin with the body? (Session 2 veterans should have a suspicion.)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Because the machinery runs both directions. Session 2 taught us that repeated bodily acts carve inclinations into the soul; Paul enlists the same machinery for the renovation: the mind is renewed by a body that shows up: at Mass, at the morning suit-up, at the nightly examen, at the gate with a pre-decided move. Nobody thinks their way into new living nearly as reliably as they live their way into new thinking. The living sacrifice is not abstract piety; it is your actual body, presented daily, doing small deliberate contrary things until the weather of the mind changes.

Quick find before we go on: the Old Testament said all of this in one sentence. Send someone to Proverbs 4:23: “Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life.” Guard the wellhead, not the downstream.

4. Here is the technique most of us were never taught. When a hostile thought arrives, what do we usually do? (Let them answer; then teach the two verbs from your prep: St. Benedict’s dash and tell, St. John Climacus’s refusal of the conversation.) Why does that way work when ours does not?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

We usually wrestle: argue with the thought, measure it, replay it, negotiate: hours in the parlor with a guest we never should have seated. Attention is the thought’s food; the wrestling match caters the siege. The tradition’s counsel is two verbs. Dash: the instant the thought appears, break it against Christ with a short prayer: “Jesus, Stronger One, this house is yours”; your countersword verse; the

Holy Name alone. No debate: as we like to put the tradition's counsel, no one ever lost an argument he declined to attend. Tell: disclose the recurring temptation to a confessor, director, or trusted friend (our widening of St. Benedict's spiritual father); disclosure weakens most recurring temptations (Session 3's false lover, again). Unwanted intrusive thoughts that torment rather than lure are different: those go to a confessor and clinician, not general disclosure.

Notice this is redirection, not suppression: you are not clenching against the thought (which feeds it); you are turning toward Someone else and letting it starve behind you. The watchman's eye is on Christ, not on the thought. The tradition calls the habit *nepsis*, sobriety of mind: and it is trainable, like any watch.

5. Read Philippians 4:4-9 aloud. Paul never says "stop thinking about what is false." What does he say instead (vv. 6 and 8), and how does this give us both the second technique and the answer to the swept house?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

He says replace. Anxiety is not argued down; it is prayed out: "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God," and the peace that follows stands sentry ("will keep your hearts and your minds": a garrison verb). And the mind is not emptied of the false; it is crowded with the true: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious... think about these things." The mind abhors a vacuum exactly the way the swept house did. You cannot merely evict a lie; you must furnish the room it lived in.

This is also the logic of the opposing virtue, the tradition's standing prescription: starve a vice by practicing its contrary, small and deliberately. The resentful pray blessing on the rival by name; the glutton fasts small and kindly; the vain hide one good deed; the discouraged thank God for three concrete things at night. Session 2's machinery (repetition forms inclination) is now conscripted for the Kingdom: every small contrary act, done for love (St. Thérèse's whole way), lays a course of the counter-wall. The house was occupied last week at the altar. Tonight we furnish it.

DISCOVERY MOMENT (THE ESCAPE ROUTE)

Say: somewhere in Paul, in a passage built entirely on Israel's wilderness, there is a promise so practical that many people fighting for their sobriety have leaned their weight on it. Send the group into 1 Corinthians 10 to find it and to name its parts (the wilderness frame in verses 1-12 is worth noticing on the way).

Read it aloud: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." Draw out its three mercies. Common to man: you are not a special monstrosity; the enemy's "no one struggles like you" is quartermaster-issue isolation. God is faithful: the load is measured by Someone who knows your strength in grace, not your strength alone. And the way of escape comes with the temptation, same delivery, present in the room: usually humble: the door, the phone call, the short prayer, the next right task, the exit marked in letters only humility can read. Train the reflex: the moment the room fills with smoke, look for the sign.

Build, Then Press: The Psychologist's Case

BUILD THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

A psychologist friend, who wants you well, says: "Be careful with 'take every thought captive.' Thought suppression backfires; try not to think of a white bear and the bear moves in. Clinically, people who monitor and fight their intrusive thoughts get more of them, not fewer: that loop is the engine of OCD and religious scrupulosity, and I have seen 'spiritual warfare of the mind' make anxious believers dramatically worse. Modern approaches teach acceptance: notice the thought, let it pass, do not engage. Your tradition's constant vigilance sounds like a recipe for the very obsession I treat."

Give it full honor: the suppression research is real, the clinical harm is real, and the anxious believers are real: some may be in your room.

6. Now press, carefully: set the friend's counsel next to the technique you just taught from the tradition and next to Philippians 4, which we read. How much do they agree? And where, finally, does the tradition see something the clinic alone cannot?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

They agree far more than the friend suspects, and say so gladly. The tradition's technique is not suppression and not a wrestling match: dashing a thought against Christ is disengagement plus redirection: decline the debate, turn the attention elsewhere: a partial structural analogy to what good clinicians teach, worked out in the desert many centuries earlier. The tradition equally condemns the monitoring loop: temptation is not sin (Session 3), the arriving thought is not consent (Session 2), and obsessive thought-policing is the enemy's counterfeit of watchfulness: attention aimed at the self in fear rather than at Christ in trust. Where intrusive thoughts are a torment rather than a lure, the Church sends you to the confessor and the clinician together, allied: that is this study's standing counsel, and it is Catholic counsel, not a concession.

But press the last inch. "Notice and let pass" in good therapy does send attention somewhere: toward chosen values and the next right action, and that is a real natural good. What the tradition adds is the destination's name: not merely toward values, but toward a Person. "Think about these things" has an address; the dashed thought breaks against a Rock that loves you; the escape route is provided by Someone faithful. The clinic can teach you to release a thought. Only the Kingdom furnishes the house.

DIG DEEPER (IF TIME ALLOWS)

Psalm 1: the two ways as two attentions: the blessed man "meditates day and night" on the law and becomes a tree planted by streams; what you meditate on roots you. The stronghold is a meditation practice pointed at a lie.

Matthew 6:14-15: forgiveness has a load-bearing place in the renewed mind: the resentment with a lease (Session 1's phrase) is starved like any vice, by its opposing act, and Jesus ties our own forgiveness to our forgiving. If a wall in your room is built of resentment, this is its opposing virtue.

2 Corinthians 10:5 revisited: "take every thought captive to obey Christ." In context Paul wars against arguments raised against the knowledge of God; applied to the inner life (our application), the picture still teaches: captives are marched somewhere, to obey Christ. Not a wrestling match; a

change of custody.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT

7. What is your wall's opposing virtue: the specific contrary practice that would starve it? Name it to yourself in one concrete, Tuesday-sized act.

8. Where does your escape route usually appear, and what has kept you from taking it: not seeing it, or seeing it and negotiating?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- **Dash and tell.** All week, meet the first movement of the old thought with your short prayer, instantly, no debate. And tell your confessor, director, or one trusted person about the temptation that recurs most: disclosure disarms. (Tormenting intrusive thoughts are different: those belong with a confessor and clinician, not a worksheet.)
- **One course of the counter-wall daily.** Do your opposing-virtue act once a day, small, deliberate, for love: Thérèse-sized. Repetition is now fighting for you.
- **Hang Philippians 4:8.** Write the verse where the old habit lived (the mirror, the desk, the lock screen) and let it furnish the room: whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious: think about these things.

CLOSING PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, Rock against whom every lie shatters:
we bring you the six inches of battlefield we carry everywhere we go.
Renew our minds by our presented bodies; keep our hearts and minds in your peace;
and when the smoke fills the room this week, show us the exit you shipped with the test.
The house is occupied. Now furnish it, room by room. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Romans 12:2

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 6, in order:

1. Romans 12:1-2 (main reading: presented bodies, renewed mind)
2. Proverbs 4:23 (quick find: guard the wellhead)
3. Philippians 4:4-9 (main reading: prayer over anxiety; think about these things)
4. 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 (Discovery Moment: the wilderness frame and the way of escape, v. 13)
5. Psalm 1 (Dig Deeper: meditation roots you)
6. 2 Corinthians 10:5; Matthew 6:14-15 (Dig Deeper: change of custody; forgiveness as opposing virtue)
7. Recurring thread (allusion, read in Session 1): Luke 11:24-26 with Matthew 12:43-45 (the swept house, furnished tonight)
8. Romans 12:2 (memory verse)

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

THE STRONGER ONE

Session 8: The Spoils of War

Galatians 5:1-25 · Mark 5:1-20 · John 8:31-36, 44

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers what freedom is for. The liar's voice, tracked since week one, is finally named from Jesus's own mouth and answered by the truth that frees; the freed man of the Gerasenes shows that the first assignment of the delivered is testimony; and Isaiah reveals the study's last discovery: the freed captives become the rebuilders of ruins. The spoils of this war are people.

Catholic Touchstone. "There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just" (CCC 1733); the fruits of the Spirit as first fruits of eternal glory (CCC 1832); the witness of a Christian life as a power that draws others to the faith and to God (CCC 2044).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Everything tonight is harvest. Begin with Galatians 5:1, the study's final memory verse and its whole arc in one sentence: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Both halves matter: the indicative (Christ has set us free: the Stronger One's work, not ours) and the imperative (stand fast: the freed man garrisons his liberty). And then Paul immediately guards freedom's meaning: "only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another" (5:13). Freedom in the Catholic grammar is not the absence of claims on me; it is the capacity to give myself away. The Catechism compresses it: "The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes" (1733). Escape is week one; tonight is about what the escaped are for.

The liar's voice thread resolves tonight, and the resolution has been parked in John 8 since Session 2. First the naming, from Jesus without euphemism: the devil "was a murderer from the beginning... there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (8:44). The liar's pattern runs through every whisper the study has catalogued (the fog, the denial, the slander, the minimize, the annihilate), amplified by flesh and world; and lying has become his native language by his own irrevocable choice (he was created good, and ruined himself). Then the answer, the two verses we have refused to cash for six weeks: "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (8:32), and "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (8:36). Put them together, with John 14:6, and the study's deepest claim lands: the truth that frees is not merely information but ultimately a Person; the Son is the truth the liar has no answer to. The war against the father of lies was always going to be won by the one who said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

The Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20) is tonight's commissioning text, and read it whole: the man who lived among the tombs, whom no one could bind any more, even with a chain: a stronghold in its terminal form: isolation, self-harm, a man whose own voice is buried beneath the demons' answer, "Legion." Then the deliverance, and the detail Mark loves: the man "sitting there, clothed and in his right mind." And then the surprise that gives tonight its shape: the man begs to come with Jesus, and Jesus says no. "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." The first person Mark shows evangelizing the Decapolis is a former demoniac, and his commissioning is simply to tell what mercy did. Freedom's first assignment is testimony,

delivered to the people who knew you walled. (One guardrail said aloud: the Gerasene's affliction is extraordinary demonic possession, which the study's "stronghold" metaphor is not claiming about anyone's habit, wound, or illness; what carries over is Christ's authority and the shape of the commissioning, not the diagnosis.)

Teach testimony's prudence alongside its power, because your room has been promised privacy for eight weeks and must not hear tonight as a demand to unseal the Wall publicly. The Gerasene pattern is exact: he narrates mercy, not pathology: "how much the Lord has done for you" is the assignment, not a tour of the tombs. Some walls (and other people implicated in them) should stay under the seal of prudent discretion or the confessional forever; what can always be shared is the shape of rescue: I was stuck; Christ was stronger; here is where mercy lives. Discernment, a spiritual director, and time decide how much more. Session 7's Peter already set the deeper truth: it is the healed wound, not the open one, that feeds sheep.

Last: the fruit and the ruins. Galatians 5:22-23 lists what grows in the garrisoned house: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control": notice these are fruits, not achievements: what the occupying Spirit produces in soil kept clear, and the direct opposite of a stronghold's produce. And Isaiah 61 (the night's central discovery) shows the last movement of the arc: the anointed one proclaims "liberty to the captives," and then the freed captives themselves "shall build up the ancient ruins... they shall repair the ruined cities." The delivered become the construction crew. Somebody in your parish is sitting inside the wall your participant just left, and your participant's experience gives them a rare empathy and credibility for finding them, used with discernment, stability, and help. In the study's imagery, the spoils of the Stronger One's war (Luke 11:22: "divides his spoil") turn out to be people: recovered, and then deployed.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Isaiah 61:1-4. The anointed one's manifesto ("to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound"), which Jesus claimed as his own in Nazareth: and its rarely-read fourth verse, where the freed ones become rebuilders of the ancient ruins. Central discovery; do not name it in advance.

Psalms 124:7. "We have escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped!" Israel's corporate victory cry after rescue: tonight it becomes the group's own closing acclamation, prayed together.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Against Heresies IV.20.7

One of St. Irenaeus's best-known sentences reads, literally, "the glory of God is a living man, and the life of man is the vision of God"; the popular modern paraphrase runs "the glory of God is man fully alive." Either way the claim is staggering: God's glory is not diminished by human flourishing but displayed in it; a human being restored to full life is what the Father's renown looks like in public.

For our purposes: a stronghold is an anti-glory: a life narrowed, dimmed, and walled. Every wall that comes down makes God visible. Your freedom is not merely your relief; it is his reputation, walking around the parish.

The common rendering and the more literal one are both given; the sentence is his, from Against Heresies IV.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine of Hippo

Confessions, Book I (ch. 1)

We began this study with Augustine bound: the chain of habit, welded link by link, from Book VIII. We end with the sentence he placed at the very front of the Confessions, the one the whole work exists to explain: “you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

For our purposes: here is the study’s last diagnosis and first cause in one line. Every stronghold was a counterfeit rest: the restless heart trying to build a home out of the wrong materials. The man of the chain became the man of the rest: not by better chains management, but by finally coming home. That is the home Christ desires, and his grace is working toward, for everyone in your room.

Confessions I.1, in a familiar English rendering; translations vary.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Paul II

Homily at Oriole Park at Camden Yards, Baltimore, 8 October 1995

Preaching in America, St. John Paul II declared: “Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.” One sentence, and the whole modern counterfeit of freedom (limitless option, zero claim) is set aside for the real thing: freedom as capacity for the good, the liberty of a hand finally healthy enough to give.

For our purposes: the pope of the twentieth century’s great captivities says what Galatians 5 says: freedom has a purpose written into it. The stronghold promised freedom as license and delivered slavery; Christ delivers freedom as power to love, and it holds.

The sentence is quoted in the wording widely reported from that homily.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1733.** “The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just.” Freedom grows with use, like the virtues it serves: the exact reverse of the stronghold’s physics, where each surrender narrowed the next choice.
- **CCC 1832.** The fruits of the Spirit are perfections the Holy Spirit forms in us as firstfruits of eternal glory; the tradition counts twelve (Galatians’ Greek text lists nine, which is what your group reads; the Latin tradition behind CCC 1832 counts twelve): fruit is grown, not manufactured: your assignment is the soil (the garrisoned, furnished house), and the Spirit does the producing.
- **CCC 2044.** The witness of a Christian life, and good works done in a supernatural spirit, have great power to draw men to the faith and to God. Mark 5 gives one vivid form that witness can take: telling what the Lord has done. Testimony is not optional decoration on freedom.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY): FINAL RESOLUTIONS

THE LIAR’S VOICE (RESOLVES TONIGHT). Named from John 8:44 (a liar and the father of lies: it is what he is), and answered by 8:32 and 8:36: the truth that frees is a Person, and the Son’s freedom is “free indeed.” When it lands, take a moment to walk the whole thread aloud: the fog of Eden, the “never in bondage” self-deception, the two-stroke engine: all one voice, all answered by one Word. This is the study’s summit; do not rush it.

THE ARMOR and THE SWEPT HOUSE (resolved Sessions 4-6). Tonight's fruit passage shows the furnished house flourishing; if the group connects fruit to furniture, the study has done its work. THE WALL (final instruction tonight). Whether sheets were torn or kept, tonight each participant writes something new on Take-Home 8's commissioning card: one name (someone still walled-in, held in prayer) and one act of strengthening. The study ends facing outward.

COMMISSIONING: run the closing as written: Psalm 124:7 prayed together as an acclamation, the sending prayer, and any parish touch you arranged (a blessing from Father, a candle, the cards). Send them out as the Church sends: with a job.

SESSION GOALS

1. Land Galatians 5:1 whole: the indicative (Christ freed) and the imperative (stand fast), with freedom defined as capacity for love, not absence of claims.
2. Resolve the liar's voice: named (John 8:44), answered (8:32, 36): the truth that frees is a Person.
3. Read the Gerasene as commissioning: deliverance, right mind, and the surprising "go home and tell."
4. Teach testimony's prudence: narrate mercy, not pathology; discernment governs disclosure.
5. Deliver the Isaiah 61 discovery: freed captives become rebuilders of ruins.
6. Commission the group: fruit in the garrisoned house, a name on every card, Psalm 124:7 as the closing acclamation.

TIMED PLAN (90 MINUTES)

- Welcome, covenant (final time), opening prayer: 8 min
- Win questions: 8 min
- Build: Galatians 5:1, 13-25 and the freedom steelman: 22 min
- Build: John 8: the liar named, the truth that frees (thread resolution): 15 min
- Build: Mark 5 commissioning and the Isaiah 61 discovery: 20 min
- Send, commissioning cards, Psalm 124 acclamation, closing: 17 min

If time runs short: cut the Dig Deeper box and one Win question. Do not cut the John 8 resolution or the commissioning; the first is the study's summit and the second is its purpose.

PASTORAL NOTE FOR THE LEADER (STANDING NOTE, FINAL SESSION)

No one is ever asked to name their battle: including tonight. Testimony teaching must be delivered with the privacy covenant explicitly reaffirmed: nothing tonight asks anyone to unseal their Wall to this group or any group; the Gerasene narrates mercy, not pathology, and discernment (ideally with a confessor or director) governs every disclosure beyond that. Where a stronghold involves addiction or compulsion, commend continuing exactly the alliances this study built: Confession, direction, professional and group support: freedom is garrisoned, not graduated from. And end warmly: eight weeks of this material is heavy lifting, and your people did it. Tell them so.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

*Lord Jesus Christ, Stronger One: eight weeks ago we came with walls we could not name.
You have named them, mapped them, armed us, absolved us, fed us, and lifted us when we fell.
Tonight, finish what you began: name the liar, speak the truth that frees,
and send us out as witnesses of your mercy, each as you call us: many, like the Gerasene, home, with a
story about mercy.
Amen.*

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What is something you were finally freed from (a debt, a cast on a broken limb, a terrible job) where the strangest part was learning what to do with the freedom? What did you do first?
2. Who is someone whose story of getting through something gave you real hope: more than any expert's advice could? What made their telling of it so powerful?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT

Read Galatians 5:1-25 aloud (keep vv. 2-12 in: they name what the yoke was).

3. Galatians 5:1 has two halves: an announcement and a command. Name them both. Why does the study's whole arc need both halves?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The announcement: "For freedom Christ has set us free": the indicative, the Stronger One's finished work; freedom is given, not achieved, exactly as Session 1 promised. The command: "stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery": the freed man garrisons his liberty; the gift is defended or it is lost. Grace precedes, enables, and sustains everything, and the will healed by grace truly fights: Session 2's answer, now as a life posture. One more precision from verse 13: freedom is "not... an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another." Freedom's content is love; its shape is service. "The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes" (CCC 1733).

Build, Then Press: The Free Spirit's Case

BUILD THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

A friend who has watched your eight weeks says, with Galatians open: "'For freedom Christ has set us free: do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.' Exactly! So why are you leaving this study with more structure than you started: daily suit-up prayers, examens, confession schedules, accountability partners, opposing-virtue drills? That is a yoke. You escaped one master and hired five new ones. If the Son has made you free indeed, live free: no more regimens, no more religious scaffolding. And be honest: scheduled confession, virtue drills, accountability: to a reader of Galatians that can look like returning to law as the ground of your standing with God. Grace means the training wheels come off."

Honor its force: it quotes tonight's own memory verse, it fears real legalism, and everyone tired of white-knuckling feels its pull.

4. Now press from the passage itself: what does Paul call the yoke of slavery, what does he say freedom is for (v. 13), and what do free people's disciplines actually serve? (Session 2 veterans: whose machinery are the disciplines running?)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Read what the room just heard in vv. 2-6: the "yoke of slavery" in Galatians is accepting circumcision and the Mosaic law as necessary for justification: seeking standing with God through law rather than receiving it in Christ. It is precisely not the free man's training. Paul guards the other flank in the same chapter: freedom is "not an opportunity for the flesh"; and he ends our passage with "self-control" listed as fruit of the Spirit: the free life has a spine. The disciplines this study taught are not a new master; they are the freed man's garrison: Session 2's machinery (repetition forms inclination) deliberately run for the Kingdom instead of against it. Nobody calls a farmer a slave for tending what he was freely given, or an athlete for training in the liberty of health.

The test that separates garrison from yoke is simple and Pauline: what is it for, and who is it from? Done to earn God's love: yoke; drop it. Done from God's love, to guard and grow a freedom already given: garrison; keep it, joyfully and lightly. "Stand fast" is itself a command to effort: freedom, it turns out, is a position you hold, and held positions have watch schedules.

Read John 8:31-36 and John 8:44 aloud.

5. Since week one this study has tracked a voice: the fog of Eden, the "you will not die," the "never in bondage," the minimize-then-annihilate engine. Tonight Jesus names its owner. Who is he, what is he, and how do verses 32 and 36 answer him: finally and completely?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The devil "was a murderer from the beginning... there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (8:44). Not: he sometimes lies. Lying has become his native language, by his own irrevocable choice (created good, self-ruined); and the liar's pattern runs through every whisper the study catalogued, amplified by flesh and world. And note Jesus's pairing: liar and murderer: the lie was always aimed at a death ("you will not die" was spoken to kill).

The answer: "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (8:32): and then verse 36 names the freer: "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." Read with John 14:6, the truth that frees is not merely propositions to memorize but ultimately a Person to abide in: the one who said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Against the father of lies, God did not send an argument; he sent his Son. That is why every weapon this study issued (the Word, the sacraments, the renunciation, the disclosure, the countersword) works the same way: each one brings the lie into contact with him. The war of the strongholds ends where it began in Luke 11: the Stronger One, standing in the house, and the liar with nothing true to say.

Read Mark 5:1-20 aloud.

6. Here is a stronghold in its terminal form: tombs, chains, isolation, a name dissolved into “Legion.” Watch the deliverance, and then watch the ending closely: what does the freed man ask, and what does Jesus answer? Why is the answer a surprise: and a commission?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

The man begs “that he might be with him”: the most understandable request in the Gospels: and Jesus refuses it: “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” The first person Mark shows evangelizing the Decapolis is a former demoniac with no training and one qualification: he was there, and now he is “sitting... clothed and in his right mind,” and everyone knows it. His testimony needs no theology degree; its content is assigned in the sentence: how much the Lord has done, and how he has had mercy.

Mark the prudence inside the power, and reaffirm our covenant while you do: the Gerasene narrates mercy, not pathology: the assignment is the rescue, not a tour of the tombs. Nothing in this study asks anyone to unseal their Wall to any group, ever; what can always be told is the shape of rescue: I was stuck; Christ was stronger; here is where mercy lives. How much more to share, and with whom, is discernment work: a confessor or director helps. But the direction of freedom is now fixed: home, toward the people who knew you walled: because somebody there is sitting inside a wall tonight, and your history gives you a rare empathy and credibility for finding them: used with discernment, stability, and help, it is a gift few others carry.

DISCOVERY MOMENT (THE STUDY’S LAST)

Say: the passage Jesus read at Nazareth, in the inaugural sermon of Luke’s Gospel (Luke 4:16-21): the anointed one proclaiming liberty to captives: has a fourth verse almost nobody reads. It is the last discovery of this study. Send them to Isaiah 61:1-4, and ask them to find who the “they” of verse 4 are and what they do.

Read verses 1-3, savoring the ones this room has lived: liberty to the captives, the opening of the prison, the oil of gladness instead of mourning. Then verse 4, slowly: “They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.” Ask: who does the rebuilding in this verse? The restored people: the freed and comforted of verses 1-3 become the builders of verse 4: repairing devastations older than themselves (“of many generations”: some walls run in families, and someone in this room may be the one who ends a generational one). Then close the arc aloud, in the study’s imagery: Luke 11:22 said the Stronger One “divides his spoil.” Read this way, here is the spoil: people: recovered, and then deployed to the ruins. You are the plunder of Christ, and the plunder gets a trowel.

DIG DEEPER (IF TIME ALLOWS)

Galatians 5:22-23 as the anti-stronghold inventory: set each fruit against the wall it replaces (peace against the anxious grip, self-control against the compulsion, joy against the anesthetic). Fruit is grown, not manufactured: the Spirit produces it in soil kept clear: which is what all your disciplines are actually for.

Luke 22:32 revisited: “when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.” Peter’s commission and the Gerasene’s are the same commission at different scales. So is yours.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT (THE COMMISSIONING)

7. Privately, on your Take-Home card: write one name: someone who may need encouragement, prayer, or hope right now: and commit to pray for them daily. Then write one act of strengthening within your reach this month: an invitation, a conversation, a shared meal, a copy of a book, a word of your story's shape ("I was stuck; Christ was stronger"). Names are never shared aloud: this stays between you and God.

8. Eight weeks ago you named a wall on a sealed sheet. Whatever its state tonight: down, cracked, or still standing under siege: what has actually changed? Name to yourself what you know now that you did not know then: about the wall, about the enemy, and about the Stronger One.

LIVE IT: THE STANDING ORDERS (FOR LIFE, NOT A WEEK)

- **Keep the garrison.** The morning suit-up, the nightly examen, frequent Confession and Communion, the countersword, the tell-someone person, and the tradition's beloved weapon this study only now names: the Rosary, Our Lady's own patrol of the mysteries: these are not the study's homework; they are freedom's watch schedule. Keep them lightly and joyfully, from love, never for earning.
- **Work your card.** Pray the name daily. Do the act this month. Then find the next name; the ruins are large and the crew is hiring.
- **Tell the shape.** When God opens the door (he will), tell the Gerasene version: how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy. Mercy narrated is a wall-breaker in someone else's siege.

CLOSING ACCLAMATION AND SENDING (LEADER SCRIPT)

Say: eight weeks ago, most of us walked in guarding a wall. Tonight we end with Israel's shout on the far side of a rescue. Pray it with me, aloud, together: and mean every word:

"We have escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped!" (Psalm 124:7)

Then pray the sending prayer below, add any parish blessing you arranged, and send them home: the same direction Jesus sent the Gerasene.

SENDING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Stronger One: you entered the strong man's house, and you did not leave empty-handed.

We are the spoil. Divide us now among the ruins.

Send us home clothed and in our right minds, with mercy for a message, and let every wall we ever built become, in your hands, a testimony that walls fall.

To you, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory forever. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

Galatians 5:1

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 8, in order:

1. Galatians 5:1-25 (main reading: freedom's gift, the yoke named in vv. 2-6, guard, and fruit)
2. John 8:31-36 (the truth that frees; free indeed; read first)
3. John 8:44 (the liar named: thread resolution); John 14:6 (the truth in person, question 5)
4. Mark 5:1-20 (main reading: the Gerasene; commissioning)
5. Isaiah 61:1-4 with Luke 4:16-21 (Discovery Moment: the restored rebuild the ruins; Nazareth)
6. Luke 11:22 (arc closure: he divides his spoil)
7. Luke 22:32 (Dig Deeper: strengthen your brethren)
8. Psalm 124:7 (closing acclamation)
9. Galatians 5:1 (memory verse)