

SESSION 7

DISCIPLESHIP AT A DISTANCE: PETER AND THE PASSION OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

In this session, we'll continue to look at the life of Peter and what it means to follow Jesus when things go wrong. For Peter, who witnessed miracles, walked on water, saw the Transfiguration first hand, and felt the excitement of the crowd welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem, being a disciple of Jesus was one astonishing experience after another. Being in Jesus' company day in and day out brought prestige and excitement.

But following Jesus took a dangerous turn. Jesus told of the leaders of the nation rising up against him. He talked about dying on the Cross—and expecting his followers to do the same. He spoke of being betrayed by one of his own. He seemed to present Peter with one opportunity after another to rise—or fall. The glory of the miracles gave way to a promise of pain and suffering. Peter's life was on the line.

What do these events mean to us? How can we learn to face inevitable trials with the same mindset that Jesus had? When praying, how do we earnestly yield to God, even if that means accepting the cup of suffering? How can we find God's love and presence in the midst of our pain? Is it possible to stay close to Jesus when everything goes wrong? Let's find out together...



CONNECT

First review the last session with your group. Can anyone recite the Memory Verse (Luke 9:35) without assistance? Otherwise, look it up (page 111) and recite it as a group. Next, bring up any highlights the group may have about the COMMIT reflections.

1. Share an experience of when a friend helped you through a difficult time. How did that person's presence help you? How would you have felt if you had to go through your trial alone?

Some thoughts might include that while another person can't always end our trial or suffering, just their presence gives comfort to persevere. Having to go through trials alone often increases despair and hopelessness. Jesus will bring Peter, John, and James with him to the garden, but they will fall asleep. At his arrest, Jesus' Apostles will all flee, leaving him alone.

2. Think of a time when you were traveling and got lost. What caused you to lose your way? How did you get back to where you should be? What steps did you take afterward to avoid losing your way again?
- Getting lost while traveling can happen easily if a wrong turn is taken, or a sign is missed or misread. Often to get back on track we need a good map or directions from someone who knows the area. To avoid such mishaps in the future, we might resolve to be better prepared with maps or directions. Peter will “get lost” when he chooses to follow Jesus at a distance. He will deny Christ. In our journey of faith, our sins also cause us to take wrong turns or travel the wrong roads. We need to turn to God and seek forgiveness to get back on track, and work to grow in virtue to avoid these same detours.*



Play the video segment, which will last for approximately 45 minutes. The Study Guide provides participants with a brief outline of the topics covered in the video teaching.



DISCUSS

Following are suggested answers to the questions posed in this section.

1. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus discussed his “exodus” with Moses and Elijah. How does the first Passover provide the backdrop for the Last Supper—and for the night of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane?
- The Last Supper is a Passover meal, but no lamb is mentioned, since Jesus is the Lamb that will be sacrificed. Just as the blood of the lamb saved the Israelites from death, so Jesus’ sacrifice and blood save us from death to sin. After the first Passover, the Israelites spent the night watching for God’s protection from death. Jesus and the Apostles also spend the night in watching. While Israel is spared from death, Jesus embraces death to conquer sin on our behalf.*
2. Compare Jesus’ prayer in the garden with that of the Apostles. Jesus comes out of the garden with his will united to that of the Father. The Apostles will soon scatter in fear. How is Jesus’ prayer a model for us in difficult situations?
- Jesus actively speaks with the Father in the garden, while the Apostles sleep unable to combat their drowsiness and Jesus makes his request, “Remove this cup,” but he submits himself to the Father’s will. Jesus refers to God as “Father,” as he taught us to do in his Sermon on the Mount, communicating his trust in the Father’s care regardless of the suffering that is ahead. Jesus’ time in prayer is time spent in the love of the Father, and that love strengthens Jesus.*
3. Peter “followed [Jesus] at a distance” and ended up denying Jesus. How can we avoid being disciples “at a distance”?
- At the Last Supper, Peter declares he will never fall away from Jesus. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter falls asleep several times after Jesus exhorted him to “watch and pray.” After Jesus is arrested, Peter fearfully follows Jesus at a distance. As Jesus is abused and given an illegal trial in the house of the high priest, Peter remains in the courtyard and denies Jesus three times. As the cost of discipleship increases, we need to draw closer to Jesus if we are to prove faithful.*

4. At the cockcrow, “the Lord turned and looked at Peter” (Luke 22:61). What do you think was communicated in that look? How do we experience that look when our conscience convicts us of sin?

Participants will answer with their reflections. With the cockcrow and a look from his Friend, Teacher, and Master, Peter surely felt the conviction of his sin and his faithlessness. Peter may also have seen the love and the forgiveness Jesus had offered to so many over the previous three years.

5. How is Peter a model of repentance? At the Last Supper, Jesus had said to Peter, “but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:32). How might remembering those words helped move Peter from despair to repentance? What must we do in our lives to turn back to Jesus and follow him more closely?

In spite of his struggles and failures, Peter always turns back to Jesus. After denying his Master, Peter repents and weeps for forgiveness; after the Resurrection, he runs to the empty tomb and is one of the first to see the resurrected Jesus (Luke 24:34). While Peter could have chosen to despair and turn away forever (as Judas did), he instead remembers the assurances of Jesus, repents, and runs to Christ. From that point on, Peter follows Jesus so closely that it leads to his own crucifixion and death. We must also remember Jesus’ promise of forgiveness. We too must return to him, asking for his mercy and frequenting the Sacrament of Confession, telling him, like Peter: “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” If we approach discipleship with humility, hope, and love, by God’s grace we can persevere in faith, even to the point of daily picking up our own cross and laying down our lives for Jesus Christ.

6. In John 21, why does Jesus ask Peter three times, “Do you love me?” What is the significance of the “charcoal fire” mentioned in this scene? What commission does Jesus give to Peter with each of his responses?

As Dr. Gray explains, the resurrected Jesus gives Peter three chances to “undo” the threefold denial he made during Christ’s passion by answering his question with a threefold affirmation of his love: “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you” (John 21:15). The presence of the charcoal fire in both Peter’s denial and his profession of love and service connect the two scenes. By the responses Jesus gives to each of Peter’s affirmations (“Feed my lambs”; “Tend my sheep”; “Feed my sheep”), Jesus commissions Peter to tend his flock, calling him once again to protect, defend, and strengthen the Church. This commission is made in light of Jesus’ words about the Good Shepherd: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Thus Peter is called to follow Jesus’ example to the end by laying down his very life for the Church. As Jesus once called Peter along the Sea of Galilee, he says to Peter again on the same shore, with new meaning: “Follow me” (John 21:19).

7. At the Last Supper, Peter proudly declares that he will never betray Jesus, but only hours later he denies Jesus three times. Later Peter will write, “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble’” (1 Peter 5:5). How does Peter’s life inform his preaching?

Peter’s own pride leads him to boast that he would never deny Jesus. But Peter saw how quickly and completely that pride led to a great fall. It was in the moment of humble weeping before God that Peter found anew the grace to return to Jesus and to follow him faithfully for the rest of his life. Peter doesn’t write about pride and humility in theory, but rather he is informed by his own experience.



COMMIT

Following are suggested answers to questions in the daily COMMIT reflections.

COMMIT DAY 1 – LAST SUPPER, FIRST COMMUNION

Participants will reflect on Jesus' Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist.

Read Exodus 12:1-14 and as you read answer the following questions:

In Exodus 12:5-6, what is to be sacrificed? *"Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old"*

In Exodus 12:7, what was to be done with the blood? *"Then they shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them."*

In Exodus 12:8, what was to be done with the meat? *"They shall eat the flesh that night roasted"*

In Exodus 12:13, what did the blood do for Israel? *"The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you"*

In Exodus 12:2-3, 14, how often was this feast to be celebrated? *"on the tenth day of this month...you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations"*

In John 1:29, how does John the Baptist identify Jesus?

John 1:29 – *"The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, **the Lamb of God**, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (emphasis added)*

How does St. Peter refer to Jesus in 1 Peter 1:19 and in 2:22?

1 Peter 1:19 – *"But with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a **lamb without blemish** or spot..." (emphasis added)*

1 Peter 2:22 – *"He committed **no sin; no guile** was found on his lips." (emphasis added)*

Let's take a closer look at what Jesus says in the following verses.

John 6:51 – *"I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."*

John 6:53 – *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

John 6:54 – *"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."*

John 6:55 – *"For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."*

John 6:56 – *"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."*

John 6:57 – *"...so he who eats me will live because of me."*



COMMIT DAY 2 – WATCH AND PRAY

Participants will reflect upon Peter's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

After finishing the meal, Jesus and the Apostles depart, singing hymns of the Passover feast (see Matthew 26:30). According to the following passage, where do they go?

Luke 22:39 – *"And he came out, and went, as was his custom, **to the Mount of Olives**; and the disciples followed him." (emphasis added)*

Look up the following passages. What is happening in each?

Matthew 21:1-9 – *Jesus triumphantly enters the city of Jerusalem to the acclamations that he is “king” and “Son of David.”*

Matthew 21:10-13 – *Jesus enters the Temple and overturns the money changers’ tables, charging that those in charge of the Temple have made it a “den of robbers.”*

Matthew 21:23-45 – *Jesus tells a parable of wicked tenants and then says to the chief priests and elders that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from them.*

Matthew 23:1-39 – *Jesus gives a sermon against the chief priests and Pharisees.*

Matthew 21:45-46; 26:3-4 – *The chief priests, elders, and Pharisees are seeking a way “to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.”*

In Luke 22:40-41, where does Jesus go once they arrive at “the place”?

“He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw”

In Matthew 26:36-37, who does Jesus take with him?

“And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zeb’edee [John and James]”

What does Exodus 12:42 call the night of the first Passover?

Exodus 12:42 – *“It was **a night of watching** by the LORD, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is **a night of watching** kept to the LORD by all the people of Israel throughout their generations.”*
(emphasis added)

What does Exodus 12:12, 23 tell us is the reason for watching?

Exodus 12:12 – *“For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD.”*

Exodus 12:23 – *“For the LORD will pass through to slay the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to slay you.”*

Israel watches for the judgment that will be executed on Egypt and that will bring their freedom from slavery.



COMMIT DAY 3 – MOUNT OF OLIVES TO CAIAPHAS’ HOUSE

Participants will look at the geography of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives.

According to Exodus 12:29, at what hour is judgment executed on Egypt?

Midnight

Jesus is seized, bound, and led to Caiaphas, the high priest. According to Mark 14:50, what do the disciples do?

Mark 14:50 – *“And they all forsook him, and fled.”*



Participants will reflect on Peter's following Jesus at a distance.

Matthew 26:59-60 – “Now the chief priests and the whole council sought **false testimony** against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, **though many false witnesses** came forward.”

Mark 14:55-56 – “Now the chief priests and the whole council sought testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For **many bore false witness against him, and their witness did not agree.**”

(emphasis added)

"This man also was with him;" "You also are one of them;" and "Certainly this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean."

"Woman, I do not know him;" "Man, I am not;" and "Man, I do not know what you are saying."



Participants will reflect on three icons in the Church of St. Peter Gallicantu in Jerusalem.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page.