



Leader Corner

Peter's Denial

John 18:15-18, 25-27

Peter's denial is an infamous drama in the Gospel narrative, namely because 1) Peter adamantly declared he would never betray Jesus (Lk. 22:33, Mt. 26:33-35, Mk. 14:29-31), and then 2) Jesus immediately predicted that he would. But there's more we can consider regarding "why" Peter denied Jesus than simply saying "he had to, because Jesus predicted it." In this study, explore the context surrounding Peter's actions, not to excuse them, but to help humanize them. Discussing this whirlwind of confusion, embarrassment, fear, curiosity, allegiance, and high-stress may help us better understand why Peter did something he swore he would never do, and why we might be susceptible to the same, in our areas of life.

Main Idea: Events don't always go as you plan, and your role/position can change quickly.

Main Practice: Courage to stick to core convictions when facing unexpected adversity.

Main Teaching: John 18:15-18, 25-27

Refocus with Praise

"Take some time to listen, sign, or read the lyrics of the song "Faithful Now." It speaks directly to the faithfulness of God.

Other songs that speak to God's faithfulness include "Another in the Fire" & "I Trust the Name."

with Prayer

Have someone in your group pray the following Proverb, and then read John 18:15-18 and 25-27 (the passages about Peter's denial) aloud:

Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God. - Proverbs 30:7-9

Our passage picks up shortly after Peter has just sliced-off the ear of a high priest's servant in the garden (Jn. 18:10). Peter is the leader, and the gospels often show him speaking first, acting first, and generally assuming the role of the “first mover” in most situations. This incident is a stunning example of him attempting to take charge, act boldly, and steer events toward his preferred outcome. Whether you want to interpret Peter's violent sword-drawing action as brave or foolish, he apparently thought it was “now or never” and decided to go “all in” to (in his view) defend Jesus. This dynamic could help us contextualize what happens next, because the events of v.11, 15-18, and 25-27 come on the heels of what Peter thought was his most courageous, heroic moment. But, as in the past, despite Peter's best intentions, his goals didn't always align with Jesus' plan.

1. All 4 gospels mention this ear-slicing incident in the garden, but only John's gospel identifies Peter as the assailant and Malchus as the victim. Luke's gospel is the only one that tells us Jesus immediately healed Malchus' ear, which presumably diffused the situation. Read John 18:11, Luke 22:51, and Matthew 26:52-54. Why do you think Jesus responds this way to Peter's action? What impact might this have had on Peter?
2. And yet, after this public reprimand, why do you think Peter continues to follow Jesus to the high priest's courtyard? (v.15)
3. In v.16, notice the position Peter is in. In v.17, notice what type of person he ends up interacting with. And in v.18, notice what he ends up doing. As someone accustomed to being the action-oriented leader, who only moments before might have thought he was launching an armed revolution, how would you describe this turn of events and its potential impact on Peter?
4. As the night wears on, Peter would deny Jesus twice more (v.25, 27). What do you find remarkable about his third accuser? Matthew 26:74 adds more detail about the amplified way in which Peter responds. He's essentially digging his heels in on these denials, so how would you expand upon how he could have felt when that rooster crowed?
5. In summary, why do you think Peter denies Jesus these three times? How do you think you would respond in a similar situation?
6. Discuss any other key, biblically-based teaching points you recall from the weekend's sermon.

1. As a group, share times when you believe you've been “put on the spot” to publicly identify your faith in Jesus. How can you help each other to be courageous in these moments?
2. Peter clearly failed on this night. Read Matthew 10:32-33. Peter was there when Jesus first said those words. It's possible he remembered them while bitterly weeping after his denials. But despite those verses (Mt. 10:32-33), Jesus not only fully restores Peter in Jn. 21:15-19 (the 3 repetitions for 3 denials), but also gives him important work to do in the young life of the Church. Encourage each other that even if you fall short in these moments, there can still be reconciliation and restoration for those who seek it.

For Further Focus

For fuller context on the garden arrest scene and Peter's denials, read the accounts in the other 3 gospels:

- Matthew 26:31-35, 47-56, 69-75
- Mark 14:27-31, 43-50, 66-72
- Luke 22:31-34, 47-62