

Denied

Denying Jesus leads to sorrow and guilt.

LUKE 22:54-62

MEMORY VERSE: LUKE 22:70

STUDY Luke 22:54-62, reflecting on Peter's denials and his response after the third one. Read the memory verse (Luke 22:70) and consider its connection to Peter's denials.

CREATE a teaching plan using the ideas on pages 110–112. Focus on leading the group to recognize that, like us, Peter was a great sinner—but Christ is an even greater Savior. Consider ways of using the Bible Skill to add depth to the group time.

GATHER the following items:

- Personal Study Guides (PSGs) for each group member

Prepare to display:

- Pack Item 2** (*Outline of Luke*)
- Pack Item 6** (*Key Verse: Luke 20:17*)

CONSULT the weekly Explore the Bible adult podcast to gain insights on the go about this week's study on Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, LifeWay's Digital Pass, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.

REINFORCE the session by reflecting on pressures that might cause believers to attempt to blend into the crowd or deny they are followers of Christ. Identify ways to encourage believers to openly share the gospel (see Key Doctrine: Evangelism and Missions, PSG, p. 94).

FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

Evangelism and Missions

It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ (2 Tim. 4:5).

Some of the most haunting words Jesus ever uttered were about denying Him. He taught His disciples that whoever denied Him before men, He would deny before God the Father. With Jesus being our intercessor before the throne of God, these words are hard to forget. It is no surprise then that denying Jesus leads to sorrow and guilt. As Jesus faced the cross, Peter experienced the pain of denying Him. From Peter we learn about the heartbreak of denying Christ and the hope of forgiveness in the aftermath of doing so.

(In PSG, p. 91) **Reflect on a time you were abandoned by someone you considered a friend. What one word would you use to define the emotions you felt?**

BIBLE SKILL

Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.

Imagine yourself in Peter's place. Reflect on the passage again, using your name instead of Peter's. How do you feel as you read these words? Create a two-column chart. Label one column: "Faithful." Label the second column: "Failure." List some situations in your life that would fit into each column. What emotions can you identify as you think of each item?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LUKE 22:54-71

When it became apparent Jesus was to be arrested, the disciples fled into the night (Matt. 26:56). However, Peter followed from a distance as the guards took Jesus to the palace of the high priest. John was also nearby and went in with Jesus. John was known at the palace and gave word to allow Peter into the courtyard (John 18:15-16).

The doorkeeper challenged Peter, saying he was one of Jesus' disciples. Taken aback, Peter denied her claim. He went into the courtyard where the temple guards and servants made a fire to warm themselves (John 18:18). Ironically, having fled from the guards in the garden of Gethsemane, Peter joined them, alternating between standing with the guards and sitting by the fire (Luke 22:56; John 18:25). Another person accused Peter of being with Jesus. For the second time, Peter denied the allegation.

An hour later, Peter was challenged again. The accuser said Peter was a Galilean. His accent gave him away (Matt. 26:73; Mark 14:70). This accuser was a relative of the servant whose ear Peter severed (John 18:26). The temple guards must have begun examining him more closely. Peter cursed and, for the third time, denied even knowing Jesus (Mark 14:71).

Immediately, a rooster crowed (Luke 22:60). From across the courtyard, Jesus turned and looked at Peter. Peter recalled Jesus' prediction that he would deny his Lord three times (Luke 22:31-34). Realizing the enormity of his action, Peter wept bitterly as he fled from the palace.

Jesus was questioned in Caiaphas's residence during the night (Matt. 26:57-68). His official trial before the Sanhedrin could not begin before daylight. Their interrogation focused on whether He claimed to be the Son

of God. False witnesses testified against Him but the Sanhedrin needed only His words to condemn Him (Mark 14:55-62). Enemies of the Lord don't need evidence. Their minds are already set against Him.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

DISTANCE (LUKE 22:54-55)

Verse 54

The darkness of the evening was not as sinister as the hearts of the mob that **seized** Jesus and **led him away**. The words for *seized* and *led away* convey the sense that the guards used force. *Seized* translates a technical term for arresting someone.

As the authorities closed in on Jesus, the disciples ran away. After Peter's attack on the high priest's servant, they feared the worst. The temple guards could have taken them into custody and charged them before the Romans. Despite their professed allegiance to Jesus, they deserted Him when their freedom was jeopardized.

Jesus offered no resistance as they **brought him into the high priest's house**. This place included extensive rooms and a large courtyard around which was a protective wall. Caiaphas was the high priest that year. Annas was Caiaphas's father-in-law and had been high priest during the time of John the Baptist, prior to Caiaphas's assuming the role. The home of the high priest was the official residence of Caiaphas. Jesus was brought first to Annas and then was led before Caiaphas for questioning (John 18:13; Matt. 26:57). Annas may have maintained rooms in the complex, or he might have come to the place knowing Jesus would be arrested that night.

As the authorities led Jesus away, **Peter was following at a distance**. He must have hidden in the trees of the garden until the group passed down the pathway toward Jerusalem. The fact that Peter remained a distance away is understandable since he was the one who assaulted the high priest's servant with the sword. It also conveys an aspect of Peter's character. He was willing to follow Jesus but not so close as to endanger himself. Unfortunately, that description could apply to many believers today.

Verse 55

The night must have been cold because **they lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard**. The pronoun *they* refers to the main body of temple guards and servants who brought Jesus to the high priest's complex. Most homes of the wealthy and powerful maintained courtyards adjacent to the structures. Surrounded by a wall, entrance was achieved through a large door tended by servants. Since the group with Jesus had already entered, Peter needed help getting past the doorkeeper. Another disciple, whom most scholars identify as John, was known to the high priest and came in with Jesus. Seeing Peter standing outside the door, John spoke to the female slave who kept the door and brought Peter into the courtyard (John 18:15-16).

VERSE 54

⁵⁴ They seized him, led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. Meanwhile Peter was following at a distance.

VERSE 55

⁵⁵ They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, and Peter sat among them.

The authorities and perhaps two or three guards took Jesus further into the complex to meet Annas and then Caiaphas. The other members of the mob **sat down together** around the fire. They must have not noticed **Peter** as he **sat among them**. Likely, the group also included other servants from the household. At first, being with the crowd helped Peter avoid being recognized.

Believers must be careful not to distance themselves from Jesus. People may attack us because of our association with Christ, but we must remain faithful regardless of the price.

What risks are involved in following Jesus closely and unreservedly? When have you felt tempted to keep your Christianity “under the radar?”

DENIAL (LUKE 22:56-60a)

Verses 56-57

VERSES 56-57

⁵⁶ When a servant saw him sitting in the light, and looked closely at him, she said, “This man was with him too.” ⁵⁷ But he denied it: “Woman, I don’t know him.”

As long as Peter lingered in the darkness, he was somewhat safe. But **sitting in the light** of the fire, he was exposed to the scrutiny of others. A **servant saw him**. This term for *servant* is feminine, indicating the slave was a female. She was the same servant who served as doorkeeper and let Peter inside at the request of John (John 18:16-17). As Peter entered, he may have been somewhat hidden by his cloak and the darkness. As he sat near the firelight, she **looked closely at him**.

Peter must have become nervous as she said, **“This man was with him too.”** The word *too* must have indicated John, who did not try to hide but used his acquaintance with the household to gain entrance. She addressed her comments to the people around the fire, referring to Peter as *this man*.

Peter **denied** it. He may have pulled his garments more closely around his head and turned away from her. The term translated *denied* is a fairly mild word that could be rendered as not knowing what someone is talking about. Peter followed up by saying, **“Woman, I don’t know him.”**

Notice Peter’s progression so far. At first, he followed Jesus and the authorities but at a distance. Then he came into the courtyard only after John vouched for him. Next, he mingled quietly with the crowd around the fire before sitting down with them. Finally, Peter tried to distance himself from Jesus by denying he knew Him. When we choose not to commit ourselves totally to follow Jesus regardless of the cost, we end up paying a much dearer price.

Verses 58-60a

The phrase **after a little while** tells us that Peter got by with his deception for a short time. However, attention had been drawn to him. Perhaps as he sat fidgeting by the fire, the others in the group began whispering about what the maid had said. Peter moved away from the fire and onto the porch

(Matt. 26:71). Still, **someone else saw him**. This phrasing doesn't mean the others around the fire did not see Peter, but someone else recognized him on the porch. The new accuser said, **"You're one of them too."** The female servant had spoken to the group and referred to Peter as "this man." This challenger addressed Peter directly.

The syntax of the statement makes the accusation emphatic. The person's use of the word *them* goes beyond identifying Peter with the other disciple who had entered with Jesus. Since Peter and John were the only two disciples present, this reference included the larger group of disciples. The accuser may have been with the people who arrested Jesus in the garden and identified Peter as being one of them, meaning the disciples in Gethsemane.

Peter must have become fearful at this point. Luke may not have considered the contrast between Peter's response ***I am not*** and Jesus' oft repeated phrase "I am." Still, we must recognize that Jesus was always confident with His identity. At this moment, Peter wanted to be anything other than who he was. Peter accompanied his denial with an oath that he was not the man they thought him to be (Matt. 26:72).

More time passed. During Peter's crisis in the courtyard, Jesus was being questioned by Annas and ridiculed by the others. Peter had not been struck in the face like Jesus was. He had not suffered at the hands of his enemies, but he was afraid of what might happen to him if the guards believed he was one of Jesus' followers.

Peter got by with his denials for a while, but **about an hour later** he faced **another** who incriminated him more fervently. The man **kept insisting**. This verb tense connotes continuous action, meaning the man repeatedly challenged Peter. The accuser was not deterred by Peter's previous denials. He said, **"This man was certainly with him."**

As proof, the man noted that Peter was also **a Galilean**. Peter's accent revealed his homeland just as people from the south, New York, or other places can be identified by their manner of speech. It is doubtful that Peter had been conversing with the people around the fire, but they heard his previous responses (Matt. 26:73; Mark 14:70). The word **also** means they placed Peter with Jesus, who was known to be from Galilee.

At this point, whether he knew it or not, Peter's danger level soared because his accuser was a relative of the servant whose ear Peter severed in the garden (John 18:26). Peter declared he didn't know what the man was talking about.

Peter cursed and swore with an oath as he responded (Mark 14:71; Matt. 26:74). Perhaps he thought these people would not imagine that someone who followed Jesus would speak so crudely. More likely, Peter was so frightened that he reverted to the salty language of his fisherman's days.

All believers should be recognized as followers of Jesus. Like Peter, the way we speak ought to reveal we have been with Jesus because we don't use the language of the world. Rather than trying to fit into the secular culture around us, believers should live boldly for Christ and be unafraid of identifying with Him.

VERSES 58-60a

58 After a little while, someone else saw him and said, "You're one of them too." "Man, I am not!" Peter said.

59 About an hour later, another kept insisting, "This man was certainly with him, since he's also a Galilean." **60a** But Peter said, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!"

How can you see Peter's fear reflected in some believers today? What is the danger of being afraid to identify with Christ?

DEFEAT (LUKE 22:60b-62)

Verses 60b-61

VERSES 60b-61

60b Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed.

61 Then the Lord turned and looked at Peter. So Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times."

Timing is important. A **rooster crowed** after Peter denied Jesus for the third time. This took place **immediately**. If it happened half an hour later, Peter might not have made the connection between the rooster and Jesus' warning. The fact that it occurred **while he was still speaking** left no doubt as to what was happening.

God often works that way in our lives. Parents' discipline needs to occur in a timely fashion so children understand the link between misbehavior and the discipline. In the same way, God brings both discipline and blessing into our lives at just the right time so we can be aware that He is at work.

The word **then** in verse 61 means at the moment of the rooster's crowing. Jesus must have been brought out of the high priest's residence and was standing across the courtyard from Peter. Some commentators describe two courts—an inner court where Jesus was confronted by the high priest and an outer court where the guards and servants gathered. If so, from His position in the inner court, Jesus was able to look through a doorway and see Peter in the outer court.

As the sound of the rooster was heard in the early morning hour, **the Lord turned and looked at Peter**. The term *turned* is a participle, leaving the phrase to read "turning, the Lord looked." Jesus' act of turning shows He was engaged with the authorities and guards. He knew what was happening with Peter, so He physically turned toward him. The term *looked* conveys the idea of looking directly and intently. Though more than a glance, Jesus' look was not characterized as a glare or scowl. His eyes likely conveyed more sadness than accusation.

As Peter made eye contact with Jesus, he **remembered the word of the Lord**. What had taken place only a few hours earlier had been forgotten. Peter was traumatized by the events of the arrest in the garden, his stealthy shadowing of the mob, and the frightening accusations by the people around the fire. As Peter saw the Lord looking at him, Jesus' saying came flooding back: **"Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times."** Although fulfillment of Jesus' prediction took place around 3:00 a.m., in Jewish reckoning it was the same day (*today*) as when Jesus made His statement the previous evening.

Commentators often make a point about the difference between Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial. Judas had an evil intent prompted by greed, seeking gain from Jesus' arrest just as he pilfered from the disciples' money bag which he held (John 12:6). On the other hand, the fact that Peter followed Jesus into the residence of the high priest speaks to his

good intentions. He failed in these moments of testing due to fear, not wickedness. Had Peter been faithful in prayer during the garden watch, he may have been stronger in the hour of temptation.

Looking back as distant observers, we might wonder why Peter did not have some internal sense of the situation after he responded to the first accuser. We might wonder whether Peter would have failed if he had looked to Jesus instead of waiting for Jesus to look at him in his failure. If we had been in his sandals that night, having experienced the shock of Jesus' arrest, we might not have acted any differently. As it was, only after the third denial did the crowing rooster and the Master's look bring Jesus' warning to Peter's recollection.

Verse 62

As the realization of his failure flooded over Peter, he broke away from Jesus' gaze and fled from the courtyard. Technically, in the courtyard he was already outside the housing. The phrase **he went outside** means he left the high priest's compound. This term translates a participle better rendered "going outside." Use of the participle focuses the emphasis not on the manner of his leaving but on the fact that, as he went, he **wept bitterly**. The term describes someone so overwhelmed that he could not contain his emotions.

Going out the door, Peter must have passed by the same female doorkeeper whose challenge led to his first denial. Remorse filled Peter's heart, but no amount of tears could undo what he had done. His professed courage and loyalty had disappeared. Boldly he had declared he would go to prison or die for Jesus (Luke 22:33). The other disciples made the same pledge and they ran away in the garden (Matt. 26:35). At least Peter had come this far. Yet, nothing mattered but his guilty heart.

We should consider the costly nature of discipleship before being put into situations where we are challenged by unbelievers. By maintaining a constant communion with Christ and depending on the empowerment of His Spirit, we can remain faithful whenever tests come our way.

What do you think was on Jesus' mind when He looked at Peter? Why do you suppose Peter's accusers did not stop him as he left the courtyard?

VERSE 62

⁶² And he went outside and wept bitterly.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION

BEGIN: As the group arrives, invite them to reflect on the person they consider their closest friend and what makes this relationship so special.

RESPOND: After most have arrived, ask them to consider silently: *How would you feel if that person abandoned you?* From the PSG (p. 91): *What one word would you use to define the emotions you felt (or would feel)?*

TRANSITION: Call attention to the first paragraph on page 91 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG). Point out today's session will examine the heartbreak Peter experienced when he denied Christ and the hope of forgiveness in the aftermath of doing so.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Call attention to the outline on page 9 of the PSG. You may also want to refer to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Luke*). Highlight the section of the outline that applies to today's session. Use information from the first paragraph of Understand the Context (p. 92) to give more details.

SUMMARIZE: Provide a brief biography of Peter by summarizing the second paragraph under Understand the Context. Read or invite a volunteer to read Luke 22:31-34, where Peter said he would not forsake Jesus.

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud Luke 22:54-55, while the rest of the group listens for Peter's position during the events.

CLARIFY: Explain that at this point, Jesus was being prepared to be taken to the Roman governor Pilate with a charge of blasphemy. Read aloud Luke 22:33, and then direct attention to Luke 22:54. Discuss: *How does distancing oneself from Jesus increase the probability of unfaithfulness?* (PSG, p. 94)

IDENTIFY: Direct the group to read the comments in the second paragraph under verses 54-55 in the PSG (pp. 93-94). Invite volunteers to share insight gained about Peter. Point out that Peter was in the middle of Jesus' captors, hoping to remain unnoticed. Ask: *What are the dangers of Christians attempting to blend in to an unbelieving crowd?* (PSG, p. 94)

TRANSITION: *Peter didn't remain unnoticed for long; the light of the fire exposed him in this darkest hour.*

READ: Invite the group to read silently Luke 22:56-60a, locating the three instances where Peter denied Christ.

STUDY: Form three teams. Assign each team one of Peter's denials. Instruct the teams to search the PSG (pp. 95-96) for information about the denial. Invite them to share responses with the rest of the group.

HIGHLIGHT: Point out the progression of Peter's denials. He moves from denying he knows Christ ("him," v. 57) to denying his association with the disciples ("them," v. 58), to claiming the accusations are ungrounded ("don't know what you're talking about," v. 60). Discuss: *How do the people with whom one associates impact how others might view that person?* (PSG, p. 96)

PROPOSE: Call attention to the Key

Doctrine (Evangelism and Missions; PSG, p. 94), which emphasizes the importance of verbal witness. Lead the group to identify pressures that might cause a believer today to deny he or she is a follower of Jesus. Ask: **How do the pressures compare to what Peter faced?**

TRANSITION: *The pressure of the moment cracked Peter. The three-stage denial had now occurred. He walked away in shame.*

READ: Read Luke 22:34, and ask the group to reflect on that verse as you **read aloud Luke 22:60b-62.**

CLARIFY: Observe that other Gospel accounts indicate this would have been an odd time to hear a rooster crow. To make matters worse, Jesus and Peter made eye contact.

REACTION: Invite the group to locate Peter's response in verse 62. Guide them to compare his emotions here with those earlier in the passage. Point out that the language used to describe Peter's bitter weeping is used elsewhere in the Bible to refer to the grief over someone's death. Essentially, Peter was dying on the inside.

HIGHLIGHT: Summarize the last paragraph under the comments about verse 62 (PSG, p. 98) that includes Jesus' forgiveness and restoration of Peter. Discuss: **What role does accountability play in receiving grace? How is accountability a function of God's love?** (PSG, p. 98)

GUIDE: Point out from the PSG (p. 98): *Peter's failure and subsequent restoration through repentance and grace reminds us that the victorious Christian life isn't the sinless life; it's the repentant life.*

TRANSITION: *In spite of Peter's denial, Jesus remains the Lord.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Direct the group to review Luke 22:54-62, looking for how the passage relates to the session Summary Statement: *Denying Jesus leads to sorrow and guilt.* Call attention to **Pack Item 6** (*Key Verse: Luke 20:17*). Read the verse, acknowledging that all must make the decision whether to reject or accept the Cornerstone.

RESPOND: Prior to the group time, reflect on your response to the first question set under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 99). Share insight gleaned from your reflection with the group. Invite volunteers to share responses. As a group, commit to pray for each other and to hold each other accountable as you develop spiritual disciplines. Encourage the group to read and respond to other question sets later in the day or week.

PRAY: Conclude the group time with prayer, thanking God for Peter's example that the victorious Christian life is the repentant life. Ask God to hold the group accountable when repentance is necessary, and thank Him for His forgiveness and restoration.

OPTIONS

Use these options to supplement and enhance the group plans on the previous pages.

MUSIC

Play a recording or video of the song “I’ll Tell the World That I’m a Christian,” by Baynard L. Fox. Before beginning the session, explain that the study will focus on three specific times one of Jesus’ closest disciples refused to tell others he knew Christ.

REFLECTIVE

Prior to the group time, develop a case study that portrays a person whom someone considered to be a friend abandoning him or her. When the group arrives, provide copies of the case study and direct them to discuss how they might advise the person who feels he or she has been abandoned. If time permits, discuss how they might advise the person who abandoned his or her friend.

NATURAL

Display a photo of a campfire. Invite volunteers to share experiences of being around a campfire. Discuss how campfire experiences often are used for a time of sharing or unity. Contrast those with Peter’s campfire experience in Luke 22.

VISUAL

Gather art supplies.

Provide art supplies, and invite the group to design masks people might wear to conceal that they are followers of Christ. Say: *We have moments when we try to hide our Christian identity in an effort to blend into the world. If we are truly believers, then we cannot wear the mask too long. The Spirit of God calls His children out into the light.*

RESEARCH

Pre-enlist a volunteer to prepare a “rest of the story” presentation on Peter’s life. Help the person discover resources for the research, such as commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and study Bibles. Call for the volunteer to present his or her findings to the group, as well as share information about the resources used for research.

COMPARISON

Direct the group to compare Peter’s denial in today’s Scripture with John 21:15-17. Point out that Peter had denied Jesus three times; Jesus asked Peter three times to reaffirm his love for Jesus before Jesus re-commissioned him for gospel service. Use information about verse 62 (PSG, pp. 97–98) to discuss Peter’s failure and subsequent restoration through repentance and grace. Lead the group to discuss: ***What do these verses reveal about the actions one needs to take to be restored?***

LOGIC

Point out the Did You Know? box on page 96 of the PSG: *According to John 18:26, the third accusation against Peter (Luke 22:59) came from a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off.* Using logic, allow small teams of people to discuss how the soldier’s encounter with Jesus may have affected his family, leading to a family member checking Peter’s faithfulness to Jesus. Discuss how small acts of obedience have resulted in increasing the faith of people in your life.