

PETER'S DENIAL OF JESUS

by Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord..."

(Luke 22:60-61a)

FAITH STORY:

Luke 22:54-62

FAITH FOCUS:

Peter was following from a distance when Jesus was arrested by the officers of the temple police. Three different bystanders recognized Peter as someone who had been with Jesus and asked him about it, but Peter denied it all three times. After his third denial, a rooster crowed and Jesus looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had predicted that by the time the rooster crowed that day, he would deny Jesus three times. Peter wept bitterly over his failure to stand by his friend and Lord.

SESSION GOAL:

Help students consider the times they have denied the presence of Jesus in their lives and understand that there is both disappointment and grace in Jesus' response to them.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Study the story of Peter's denial and discuss possible reasons for his words of denial.
- Think about times when they have denied Jesus
- Understand Jesus' response to them when they deny him.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1** Be prepared to tell your own story of a most embarrassing moment or when you felt like crawling into a hole.
- 2** Colorful construction paper, a variety of colorful markers, glue and scissors, pipe cleaners—other art supplies.
- 3** Paper and pens
- 4** Practice reading the closing psalm/prayer or contact a student prior to class and ask them to prepare to read it.
- 5** Index cards if using optional activity in Respond.

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–10 minutes)

Ask students to think about a most embarrassing moment in their lives, or when they wished they could crawl into a hole. Tell you own story first and then invite students to tell theirs.

CONNECT: (2 minutes)

Say: *We all do stupid stuff or make embarrassing mistakes. The people in the Bible were human so they did those kinds of things too. Our story today is about a man who messed up big time when he denied knowing a good friend of his. Can you imagine? They'd been friends and together nearly every day for three years, and yet he said he didn't know his friend. Let's see what happened.*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (10 minutes)

Ask for volunteers to read the scripture passage in Luke 22:54-62. Divide the passage so you have a narrator, servant girl, second bystander, third bystander, and Peter reading their parts.

After the scripture has been read, divide into groups of 3-4 students and assign each group the same questions:

What's up with Peter? Why did he deny knowing Jesus? Has he always been a coward?

Bring the group together to discuss the answers, then discuss the following questions in the large group:

What do you think was in Jesus' eyes when he looked at Peter?

How do you think Peter felt when Jesus looked at him?

Share a mini-lecture with students from the Insights into Scripture.

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Invite students to think about a time when either they know they have disappointed Jesus OR they disappointed their parents or another adult in their lives. Ask them to use the art supplies to create something that symbolizes that event. Let them know that it can be abstract and that if they don't want to share its meaning with others, they won't have to.

When students have completed their art piece, hand out paper and pencils and ask them to write down their thoughts on the following questions:

- How have your parents or other adults responded to you when you did something that disappointed them? Have you experienced their anger? Sadness? Grace? Forgiveness?
- How do you think Jesus feels when you do something that disappoints him? How are his responses the same or different from your parents and other adults you know?

RESPOND: (5 minutes)

Invite students to listen as you (or the student you contacted) reads the following psalm/prayer slowly and deliberately.

Train me, God, to walk straight;
then I'll follow your true path.
Put me together, one heart and mind;
then, undivided, I'll worship in joyful fear.
You, O God, are both tender and kind,
not easily angered, immense in love,
and you never, never quit.
So look me in the eye and show kindness,
give your servant the strength to go on,
save your dear, dear child!
Make a show of how much you love me
so the bullies who hate me will stand there slack-jawed,
As you, God, gently and powerfully,
put me back on my feet.

Portions of Psalm 86:11-17, The Message by Eugene Peterson

Close with this prayer. Lead out with a line and ask students to repeat it after you:

Lord God, look me in the eye,
(repeat)
forgive me my failures,
(repeat)
show me your kindness,
(repeat)
give me the strength to go on.
(repeat)
Put me on my feet
(repeat)
and walk with me today.
Amen.

Optional: *Hand out index cards and pens. Invite students to copy the prayer onto the card and take it home with them to say every morning or evening.*

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

What an interesting guy Peter is! One moment he's saying that he's willing to follow Jesus into prison and even death—the next moment he denies knowing him three times! One moment he has the faith to step out into the water to walk to Jesus, and the next moment he's panic-stricken and drowning. Peter is so...human. So like the rest of us.

But the reality is that Peter, and the other disciples, is all Jesus has. Of course Jesus, the Son of God, has the power of the Almighty with him; but when it comes to entrusting the Good News to people to spread it to others, all Jesus has is flawed humans. Humans who, despite knowing and living with him for three years, cave in to fear and don't acknowledge him when he gets into trouble. Humans who are willing to sell his friendship for 30 pieces of silver.

No wonder there had to be huge disappointment in Jesus' eyes as he looked at Peter after the crowing of the rooster. Peter saw the sadness and knew his badness. He wept bitterly.

But there had to be something more in those eyes. Romans 11:22 speaks of the kindness and severity of God, and surely both characteristics of our God came through in Jesus' eyes. Just as earthly parents feel and express anger and frustration when their children let them down, so our Parent God must feel those emotions when we mess up. And just as good earthly parents find ways to offer grace and go on, God doesn't give up on us. After all, look at Peter—the rock upon which Jesus declared the church would be founded.

Denial, disappointment, grace and going on—it was all there for Peter, and it's all there for us.