

Week 6.2 - When Fear Speaks Louder than Faith

Small Group Lesson

“When Fear Speaks Louder than Faith.”

OBJECTIVE:

- John 18:15–27

EXPLORE:

(These are different commentary notes that can be used to explain the context to our students. Feel free to use your own.)

Context / Background / History

Setting the Scene

- Chapters 13–17 of John record one long evening, the night before Jesus’ crucifixion. Jesus is with His disciples. He knows that His hour has come, and He knows Judas is about to betray Him.
- Back in John 13:36–38, Peter asks:
 - **Peter:** “Lord, where are you going?”
 - **Jesus:** “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.”
 - **Peter:** “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”
 - **Jesus:** “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

Fast Forward: John 18:10–11

- As soldiers come to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane, Peter acts impulsively and very protective of Jesus:
 - **Peter:** draws his sword and strikes Malchus, the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear.
 - **Jesus:** “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”
- Jesus immediately rejects Peter’s way of fighting. In Luke’s account (22:51), Jesus even heals the man’s ear. Then, willingly and voluntarily, Jesus goes with the soldiers. He is not bullied into submission, His kingdom is not of this world, and He does not fight the way we fight.
- It’s not that he couldn’t fight. In **Matthew 26:53**, Jesus says: “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”
 - A **legion** was a Roman military unit of about **5,000–6,000 soldiers**.
 - **Twelve legions** = roughly **72,000 angels** — an overwhelming heavenly army.

- In the Old Testament, one angel struck down **185,000 Assyrian soldiers** in one night (2 Kings 19:35). Imagine the power of 72,000 angels.
- Jesus wasn't powerless; He was choosing to submit to the Father's plan of salvation. He was the Lamb of God, born to die for the sins of the world.

Two Stories Interwoven (John 18:15–27)

- John writes this scene like a novel, showing two events happening at the same time:

1. **Jesus' trial before the high priest.**
2. **Peter's denial of Jesus.**

- While Jesus, the Son of God, stands firm under trial, Peter, His most devoted disciple, sins against Him by denying Him.

Peter's First Denial (John 18:15–18)

- Matthew tells us all the disciples scattered (Matthew 26:56). Yet Peter is still following — but *from a distance*. Mark 14:54 says the same.
- Picture it: Jesus is led away by hundreds of armed soldiers, and Peter trails behind at a distance. Finally, he slips into the courtyard, listening from the doorway. A servant girl recognizes him: "*Aren't you one of His disciples?*" Peter replies: "*I am not.*"
- His first denial. He tries to blend into the crowd, warming his hands by the fire, but growing cold inside.

Jesus on Trial (John 18:19–24)

- Jesus reminds them: His teaching has been public, not hidden. Acts 26:26 says: "*These things were not done in a corner.*"
- According to Jewish law, the high priest should have called witnesses first, starting with those for the defense. But those protections were ignored. Jesus points this out.
- Then He is struck in the face, fulfilling **Micah 5:1**: "*They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod.*"
- Think about that: the creation strikes the Creator.
- (Side note: Many Christian scholars point to 300+ Old Testament prophecies, patterns, and foreshadows fulfilled in Jesus.)

Peter's Second and Third Denials (John 18:25–27)

- Second denial: Peter repeats, "I am not."
- Third denial: challenged by a relative of the very man he struck in the garden. In that moment Peter swears and even curses, insisting he does not know Jesus. And then — the rooster crows.
- The Synoptic Gospels tell us more:

- **Matthew 26:75** – *Peter “went outside and wept bitterly.”*
- **Mark 14:72** – *He “broke down and wept.”*
- **Luke 22:61–62** – *“The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter... and he went outside and wept bitterly.”*
- That moment Jesus’ eyes meeting Peter’s broke him.

Key Observations from John 18:15–27

1. **The darkness of the human heart** – Even devoted followers like Peter, who made bold declarations of loyalty, still struggle and fail under fear and pressure. Our hearts are fragile, and failure is part of the human condition.
2. **The faithfulness and love of Jesus** – Despite our failures, Jesus still loves, restores, and uses us. He does not condemn but saves, showing that His mission is bigger than our mistakes.

STUDENT RESOURCES

- A picture of Peter denying Jesus for the third and final time
- A picture of Jesus’ trial before the high priest.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Scripture (S)

- Read together! Encourage students to highlight or make note of anything that stands out to them.

Observation (O)

- What stands out about Peter’s confidence in John 13 compared to his actions in John 18?
- How does Peter’s denial progress with each question (first a servant girl, then others, then a relative)?
- Where is Peter while Jesus is being questioned — and why does that matter?
- How does John weave the two stories together (Jesus on trial vs. Peter denying)?
- What does Jesus’ calm response to the high priest show about His character?
- What prophecy is fulfilled when Jesus is struck on the face (Micah 5:1)?
- What details are repeated (fire, warming himself, “I am not”)? Why do you think John includes these?
- How do the Synoptic Gospels add to the story (Peter weeping, Jesus’ look, etc.)?

Application (A)

- When have I ever followed Jesus “at a distance” like Peter did?
- What “fires” (places of comfort/crowds I want to fit in with) tempt me to blend in and hide my faith?
- How do fear and pressure affect my willingness to stand up for Jesus?

- Peter denied Jesus three times, what does that teach me about my own weakness and need for God's strength?
- Jesus knew Peter would fail, but He also restored him later. How does that give me hope after my own failures?
- How can I practice courage in small moments (like Peter with the servant girl) so I'm prepared for bigger tests of faith?
- What's one step I can take this week to be bold in living out my faith (at school, work, with friends)?
- How does Jesus' willingness to suffer while Peter was denying Him change the way I see His love for me?

Prayer (P)

- Pray with your students about seeing Jesus in the midst of their fear and weaknesses.