

From Folly to Faith: The Apostle Peter



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Acts 2:14–40, Acts 3, 5:1–11, 1 Peter, 2 Peter.

Memory Text: “Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’” (John 6:68, NIV).

Key Thought: The apostle Peter was one of the central pillars of the early church. Jesus changed Peter from an unreliable but passionate disciple into a rocklike tower of strength in sharing the gospel.

Peter's impulsive, emotional character has made him an interesting study. He was a disciple whose heart was in the right place but who made many mistakes.

Peter's story especially helps us understand the role of emotions in the Christian life. When you are lost in a forest, your senses can take you only so far. You can see, hear, and smell—and still be lost. You need a compass and a map, something more than what you have naturally.

So it is in our spiritual lives. What we feel is not the final test of what is truth. We need something more—something outside of us. We need a spiritual compass and map. Emotions are a vital part of the Christian life but not the most important part. Without appropriate care, they even can be dangerous. Peter was someone whose emotions got him into trouble more often than not. However, once placed under submission to Jesus, his emotions and zeal became powerful tools for the Lord's work.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 23.*

The Fisherman

Peter came from Bethsaida, a fishing village on the northeastern coast of the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida, which means House of Fishing, was where Jesus later performed many miracles. For nearly two thousand years, Bethsaida was lost to history. Not until 1987 was the archaeological site of this village discovered.

Although Peter was married (*Matt. 8:14*), we know nothing about his wife or any children he might have had. We do know he was living with his wife and mother-in-law in Capernaum when Jesus called him to be His disciple.

Read Matthew 4:18–20. How did Peter respond to Jesus’ call? What significance is found in the fact that they “left their nets” (*vs. 20*)?

The simplicity of this description leaves us to guess what went through Peter’s mind. Obviously, something about Jesus was so compelling that Peter was prepared to leave his home and livelihood to follow this itinerant Teacher. The point should be obvious to all of us. We need to be ready to do the same thing; that is, to follow Jesus no matter the personal cost (*see Luke 14:26, 27*).

Peter came from a humble working-class background. Contrast that to Paul’s background. *Acts 22:3, Rom. 11:1, Phil. 3:5; see also Acts 5:34*. What point can we take away from this contrast?

Either way, for both Peter and Paul, regardless of their different backgrounds, the call of Jesus required total commitment on their part. Upper class, working class, it does not matter.

Recount your own experience when being called by Jesus. What did it cost you? What did you have to give up? If someone asked you, Was it worth it? how would you respond, and why?

Peter's Folly

Like the other disciples, Peter had a unique opportunity to learn from Jesus. He walked many miles with Him, ate with Him, worked with Him. He listened to Jesus speak, watched the way He dealt with people, saw Him heal the sick. He witnessed dramatic spectacles—the Mount of Transfiguration, where Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah; Jesus raising the dead; Jesus arrested; Jesus risen from the grave.

Peter also had many opportunities for practical learning. Often Peter found himself in the middle of experiences that provided life-changing object lessons. All these lessons were preparing him for his role as one of the great missionaries of the early church.

In the course of his experiences with Jesus, Peter made many mistakes. Read the mistakes depicted below. What were they, and what lessons should Peter have learned from them?

Matt. 14:22–32

Matt. 26:36–46

Mark 14:29–31, 66–72

John 18:10, 11

Brash, presumptuous, prone to violence, collapsing under pressure, sleeping on the job, Peter on one level appeared to be everything that a humble, meek, faithful Christian should not be. And yet, before it was all over, Peter became one of the key leaders in the early Christian church, a powerful evangelist and missionary for Jesus. What a testimony to what God can do in a life surrendered to Him.

What lessons can you learn, from this account, about not judging others? Or even judging yourself?

Learning From Jesus

Read Matthew 16:13–26. What was the nature of the exchange? Why did Peter respond as he did? What basic lesson was Jesus seeking to teach the disciples?

Though Peter had declared that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, he had a false understanding of what that meant. The view Peter and the other disciples had of the Messiah reflected the common understanding of the day. The Messiah would come from the line of David and would overthrow the Romans and bring justice and peace.

Yet, Jesus clearly taught the disciples and the crowds that the kingdom of God was a spiritual kingdom. They would not establish it by power, swords, and daggers but by love, forgiveness, and righteousness.

At a pivotal stage of His ministry, Jesus decided to tell the disciples about His death—that He would go to Jerusalem, be killed, and rise again after three days. Peter was offended by the idea that Jesus was going to die—even though this death was to be the central pillar of the plan of salvation.

Within Peter's worldview, there was no room for this. Peter had left his home village and his fishing business to follow Jesus. He had given his life to supporting Him and His ministry. The death of his Master, therefore, had no place in the scenario Peter had painted in his mind. Jesus would set up His kingdom on earth, and Peter would play a key role in that kingdom of justice and peace. How could such a wonderful movement of righteousness and healing end in the death of its Leader? It is almost as if Peter either did not hear or did not understand Jesus' promise to rise on the third day.

Notice the degree of selfishness seen in Peter here. That explains, it seems, Christ's words in Matthew 16:23–26. Read those verses again. In what areas of your own life might you apply those words?

The Peter of Acts

No doubt, much of the Gospels do not paint Peter in a particularly great light. He is shown, time and again, floundering, falling, making great mistakes. Yet, the Gospels end with a clear indication of the bumbling disciple's future.

Read John 21:14–19. What is Jesus saying to Peter here? Why is that so astonishing, considering Peter's past?

“Feed my sheep”? That is exactly what Peter eventually comes to do. Again, what a powerful testimony to what God can do in the life of someone dedicated to Him. The fiery, impetuous Peter now takes a key role in the formation of the early church.

Browse through the following texts. What do they tell us about the role and work of Peter?

Acts 2:14–40

Acts 3

Act 5:1–11

The transformation was astounding, and the lessons for us should be obvious. Through the surrender of himself to Christ, Peter became a powerful witness for the Lord. Despite Peter's numerous mistakes and shortcomings, the Lord was still able to use him as a powerful witness.

How different are you today from when you first started following Jesus? What progress have you seen? What areas need more improvement? Why, no matter how slow the progress seems, should you never give up?

The Peter of the Epistles

When Jesus told Peter, “Feed my sheep,” no doubt the discouraged fisherman had no idea what was coming, or the role he would play in the Lord’s church. Though we have seen, in Acts, Peter fulfilling that command, we can see it also in the fact that this same Peter was also the author of two epistles, his way of “feeding the sheep” not just in his own time but for all church history. In a sense, every time we read one of his letters, we are seeing another fulfillment of Christ’s words to His disciple.

Pick one chapter, any chapter, from either of the epistles of Peter. Read it over, pray over it, and try to imagine the character of the person writing it. What can you learn about the new Peter from what you have read in that chapter?

In some ways it is hard to imagine these deep, eloquent words coming from the same man seen in the Gospels, the harsh, brash fisherman whose mouth ran faster than his mind or his faith. Yet, this is the Peter transformed by God’s grace into what Paul called “a new creature” (2 Cor: 5:17).

Particularly powerful are Peter’s words in 1 Peter 1:18–21 and in 1 Peter 2:24, in which Peter puts emphasis on the death of Jesus for the redemption of our souls. The Peter who once was determined that Jesus should never go to the Cross is now the Peter who is proclaiming the Cross as the means of redemption, as the place where Jesus, our Substitute, bore our sins. Notice, too, the wording of 1 Peter 2:18–23 in which Peter is advocating a kind of pacifism, a turning of the cheek that one would not have found in the Peter of the Gospels. Truly, the change was remarkable. It should give us all hope, regardless of where we are in our own personal character development.

Go back over the chapter you picked from one of Peter’s epistles. What was the main point? How can you take what this shepherd is feeding you and make it your own?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “A Night on the Lake,” pp. 377–382, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In his early discipleship Peter thought himself strong. Like the Pharisee, in his own estimation he was ‘not as other men are.’ When Christ on the eve of His betrayal forewarned His disciples, ‘All ye shall be offended because of Me this night,’ Peter confidently declared, ‘Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.’ Mark 14:27, 29. Peter did not know his own danger. Self-confidence misled him. He thought himself able to withstand temptation; but in a few short hours the test came, and with cursing and swearing he denied his Lord.

“When the crowing of the cock reminded him of the words of Christ, surprised and shocked at what he had just done he turned and looked at his Master. At that moment Christ looked at Peter, and beneath that grieved look, in which compassion and love for him were blended, Peter understood himself. He went out and wept bitterly. That look of Christ’s broke his heart. Peter had come to the turning point, and bitterly did he repent his sin. He was like the publican in his contrition and repentance, and like the publican he found mercy. The look of Christ assured him of pardon.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 152–154.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Go through Peter’s epistles and look for things in there that specifically show how different a person he was from the Peter of the Gospels. What encouragement can you draw from what you find?
- ❷ It is easy to criticize Peter’s lack of faith as he sank into the water. But Peter was the only disciple who had the courage to get out of the boat. What are some of the ways you need to “get out of the boat” in your Christian life? What about your own church? Does it need to do the same?
- ❸ Ellen G. White writes, “Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 195. Many followers of Christ lose their early enthusiasm to share what they have learned with others. How can church members recapture that passion for sharing the good news? How can you help each other regain this desire for witnessing?

Summary: The story of Peter is a tribute to what God can do through even the weakest disciple. Jesus harnessed Peter’s passion and good intentions and strengthened him in the faith to be a mighty pillar of the early Christian church.

God Hater Becomes a God Lover

by ROSELLE MONTEBON

Pangilinan, a lay evangelist, and his team of volunteers, held evangelistic meetings in a rural area in the northern Philippines. Toward the end of the meetings a number of people asked to prepare for baptism.

Pangilinan asked his team for a volunteer to stay behind and care for the new believers, and Roselle agreed to stay. She lived in a room provided by the village and spent her days visiting the people, holding evening worships, and teaching a literacy class twice a week. Two young women from the village stayed with her to protect her.

In this village lived a man, Totoy, who hated Adventists and didn't want them in the village. When the team left the area, he showed his anger toward them by sprinkling blood outside the door of Roselle's room while she slept. Most of the villagers suspected that Totoy had done this to frighten Roselle into leaving the village, but they had no proof. Roselle wasn't frightened by the demonstration of hatred, and she continued her work in the village.

Several months later Totoy became ill and was hospitalized with tuberculosis. After being released, he asked his physician for the medicine he needed to continue his recovery. But to his surprise, the doctor refused to give it to him. "You must go see Pangilinan," the doctor said. "He will give you the medicine." The doctor chose to distribute medicines to tribal people through trusted local workers, and in Totoy's area that trusted person was the Adventist lay evangelist.

Totoy didn't want to visit Pangilinan, but he needed the medicine. Finally he gave in and went to Pangilinan to ask for the medicine. Pangilinan gave him the medicine and vitamins he needed. Then Totoy went to live with relatives in another village, away from Adventists, he thought.

But in his new village lived Mar, another lay evangelist. Mar didn't know about Totoy's hatred for Adventists, and when he met Totoy, he invited him to church. Totoy agreed to go and began attending church regularly. He even brought his family with him. In time this man who hated God and His people surrendered his life to the Savior and asked to be baptized. He testified, "I hated God, and I hated Adventists. But God did not give up on me. His great love has saved me."

Your mission offerings help support lay evangelists such as Pangilinan, Roselle, and Mar, who work to bring people to the Savior in difficult and isolated areas of the world. Thank you.

ROSELLE MONTEBON is a graduate of Adventist University of the Philippines.