

Womens' Bible Study of 1 & 2 Peter

Introduction to Peter and His Epistles

Peter Up Close and Personal

To begin this study we want to get to know the author, the apostle Peter. The four gospels are full of things about him. We can't even begin to exhaust it. The only person in the New Testament in the gospel record mentioned more than Peter is Jesus Christ Himself.

Just speaking generally about him, our Lord spoke more often to Peter than to any other of His disciples. Sometimes He spoke to him praise and sometimes He spoke to him in blame. No disciple was so pointedly and directly reproved by our Lord as Peter. And no disciple ever ventures to reprove his Lord but Peter. No disciple ever so boldly confessed and outspokenly acknowledged and encouraged our Lord as Peter and he repeatedly did that. And no one ever intruded and interfered and tempted the Lord as repeatedly as Peter. Our Lord spoke words of approval and praise and blessing to Peter, the like of which He never spoke to any other person. And at the same time in almost the same breath He said harsher things to Peter than He ever said to any other of the twelve, except Judas.

We all love to identify with Peter. He's so human and real! He verbalized everything. It was Peter who asked the meaning of a difficult saying to understand the heart (Matthew 15). He asked how often he must forgive (Matthew 18). He inquired what is to be the reward of those who have left all to follow Christ (Matthew 19). It was Peter who asked about the fig tree and why it had withered (Mark 11:21). He asked the meaning of the things which Jesus had said about the approaching end (Mark 13). The Jews came to Peter to ask if Jesus paid His taxes (Matthew 17). He answered when Jesus asked who had touched Him in the crowd (Luke 8). It was Peter who questioned the risen Christ (John 21). Peter was always asking questions, initiating dialogue, needing to know things.

Peter had such love for Christ and such dependence on Him that it clouded his thinking. Out of love, out of faith he becomes a tempter and he tempts Christ to evade the cross. He repeated to Christ the very temptation that Satan gave Him in the wilderness. Satan comes right back through Peter to tempt Christ to avoid the cross. What a humbling experience for Peter when Jesus said, "Get behind me Satan!" Jesus has just given Peter a great revelation, promising him a great reward, that his confession and his own life will be vital to the building of the church (Matt. 16:13-23; Mark 8:27-33). And while Peter is beginning to feel important he gets his feet knocked out from under him collapsing into great remission.

Jesus said to the disciples (Matthew 26) that they would all fall away because of Him. That was the night of His betrayal and His arrest. Peter said, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." Jesus said to Peter, "Truly I say to you, this very night before the cock crows you'll deny Me three times." Peter's response to Jesus was, "Even if I have to die with You I will not deny You." And all the disciples said the same thing, too.

Now we have to note certain things about Peter. We look at his rejection and it's easy to condemn Peter. But keep in mind that he was the only one really hanging close enough for Jesus to see him. The rest were long gone. Peter's failure is the kind of failure that can only happen to a brave man who at least stayed around, the rest couldn't have failed because they were cowards. It was a sad moment. But on the other hand, he looked like a better man than the rest.

The Lord brought another experience into Peter's life we could call it his great re-commissioning. In John 21 Jesus had told the disciples, "You go to Galilee and you stay there till I come." He had told them that they were going to go and preach the Word and they were going to represent Him. Jesus had told the disciples to go to the mountain which He had designated in Galilee (Matt. 28:16). So the disciples were all together in Galilee. Peter says to them, "I am going fishing," and the others followed. They fished all night but caught nothing.

Peter wanted to go do what he felt comfortable doing, being a fisherman. But Christ had asked him to be a fisherman of men instead. How often are we swayed to keep doing what we are doing because we already know how to do it and we are also afraid of failure? Maybe Peter's thoughts were, "I know how to fish, I have fished all my life. That's one thing I can do. I don't know if I can do this ministry stuff but I can fish."

But God allowed the disciples not to catch a fish all night. Jesus asked them from the shore, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" I would not say this is a positive word to a fisherman who has been working all night. I wonder what they were thinking at that very moment? They answered back to Him, "NO". Jesus said to them, "Well cast the net on the righthand side of the boat and you'll find a catch." I don't know why but they followed His advice, and there were so many fish they couldn't pull them into the boat. At that moment John recognized the stranger on the shore to be the Lord. Even before the disciples knew it was their Lord, His voice compelled them to respond and obey. This shows us how powerful the authority of Jesus was. He had the most powerful voice of any person that ever walked this earth and He commanded them and they did it.

When Peter heard it was his Lord, being impulsive he jumped into the water to get ashore as quick as he could, leaving the rest of the disciples to bring the boat loaded down with fish.

God's timing is always perfect in understanding each of our hearts in a most personal way. The Lord asks Peter three times, "Do you love Me? Peter responds, "You know I love You, I have great affection for you." "Do you love Me?" "You know I love You, I have great affection for You." "Do you love Me?" "You know I love You, You know everything. You know I love You." "Then feed My sheep, tend My lambs." In other words, stay away from fishing. You do what I called you to do. Peter then wonders about John because they had been friends for life, and says, "Lord, what about him? Does he get to fish?" Jesus responds by saying, "If I want him to remain till the Second Coming, it's none of your business." "No matter what anyone else is doing, Peter you follow Me!" This is Peter's re-commissioning. It was very important.

Did Peter do it? Did he obey? Yes he did whole heartedly! It was Peter (Acts 1) who moved to find a replacement for Judas. He was the spokesman of the church on Pentecost. He preached a great powerful sermon and brought about the conversion of three thousand souls (Acts 2). Peter with John healed the lame man (Acts 3). Peter resisted the Sanhedrin (Acts 4) saying, "We will obey God, not men, you cannot tell us not to preach." He dealt with the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira and God killed them in front of the church (Acts 5). Peter confronted the swindler and fraud named Simon who wanted to buy the Holy Spirit (Acts 8). He healed Aeneas and raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9). Peter and Cornelius took the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10 and 11).

Choosing the Twelve

In the beginning of Christ's ministry some might imagine that if Jesus had wanted His message to have maximum impact, He could have played off His popularity more effectively. Modern conventional wisdom would suggest that Jesus ought to have done everything possible to exploit His fame, tone down the controversies that arose out of His teaching, and employ whatever strategies He could use to maximize the crowds around Him. But He did not do that. Instead He began to emphasize the very things that made His message so controversial. At about the time the crowds reached their peak, He preached a message so boldly confrontive and so offensive in its content that the multitude melted away, leaving only the most devoted few (John 6. Vs.53-54 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.).

Even before the twelve were chosen the scribes and Pharisees joined with the Herodians in collusion against Jesus, making plans to murder Him. The focus of Christ's ministry therefore turned at that point from the multitudes to the few. Clearly, it was the looming reality of His death at the hands of His adversaries that

signaled the turning point. They despised the doctrines of grace He stood for, spurned the repentance He demanded, looked with disdain upon the forgiveness He offered, and repudiated the faith He exemplified. In spite of the many miracles that proved His messianic credentials---despite actually seeing Him cast out demons, heal every conceivable sickness, and raise dead people to life---they would not accept the fact that He was God in human flesh. They hated Him and His message. He was a threat to their power. And they desperately wanted to see Him dead.

Israel had abandoned divine grace in favor of works-religion. It was based on physical descent from Abraham rather than the faith of Abraham. In choosing twelve apostles, Christ was in effect appointing new leadership for the New Covenant. And the apostles represented the new leaders of the true Israel of God---consisting of people who believed the gospel and were following the faith of Abraham (Rom. 4:16). In other words, the twelve apostles symbolized judgment against the twelve tribes of Old Testament Israel.

Jesus wasn't the kind of political leader His disciples expected, so they were slow to believe (John 10:24-25). But they surely understood the claims He was making, and they were filled with anticipation. So when He publicly appointed twelve men to be His apostles, the significance of that number was loud and clear. The apostles represented a whole new Israel, under the new covenant. And their appointment---bypassing the religious establishment of official Judaism---signified a message of judgment against national Israel. Clearly, these twelve ordinary men were not destined for an ordinary role. They stood in the place of the heads of twelve tribes. They were living proof that the kingdom Jesus was about to establish was altogether different from the kingdom most Israelites anticipated.

When Jesus chose the twelve to be His official representatives---preachers of the gospel who would carry both His message and His authority---He didn't choose a single rabbi, scribe, Pharisee, Sadducee, or priest. Not one of the men He chose came from the religious establishment, therefore casting judgment against institutionalized Judaism. It was a renunciation of those men and their organizations, which had become totally corrupt. He chose instead men who were not theologically trained---fishermen, a tax collector, and other common men. Jesus turned instead to His own humble followers and selected twelve simple, ordinary, working-class men.

It is said that the great cathedrals in Europe, make it seem as though the apostles were larger-than-life stained-glass saints with shining halos who represented an exalted degree of spirituality. The fact of the matter is that they were very, very common men. They were twelve completely ordinary men---perfectly human in every way. We mustn't lose touch with who they really were.

The apostles were mostly all Galileans, not elite, considered low-class, rural, and uneducated; commoners---nobodies.

So since there are no intrinsically qualified people of the twelve, God Himself must save sinners, sanctify them, and then transform them from unqualified into instruments He can use. The twelve were like the rest of us; they were selected from the unworthy and the unqualified. They did not rise to the highest usefulness because they were somehow different from us. Their transformation into vessels of honor was solely the work of Jesus Christ.

The twelve turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). It was not because they had extraordinary talents, unusual intellectual abilities, powerful political influence, or some special social status. They turned the world upside down because God worked in them to do it. The driving passion of the twelves' lives became the glory of Christ. And it was that passion, subjected to the influence of the Holy Spirit---not any innate skill or human talent---that explains why they left such an indelible impact on the world.

The Greek verb meaning of the word apostle is "to send out". The noun form means "one who is sent". The word has an exact parallel in the Aramaic word, Shaliah. The common language in Israel during Jesus' time and the language Jesus spoke was Aramaic. A shaliah was an official representative of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of Israel. A shaliah exercised the full rights of the Sanhedrin and spoke for them, and when he spoke, he spoke with their authority. His task was to deliver the message of the group whom he represented. The shaliah office was well known, being sent out to settle legal or religious disputes, under full authority of the whole council. The Jewish Mishnah (a commentary on the Law) recognized the role of the shaliah stating, "The one sent by the man is as the man himself". Jesus appointed apostles, He was saying something very familiar to people in the Jewish culture. These were His delegates. They were His trusted shaliah. They spoke with His authority, delivered His message, and exercised His authority.

Virtually everyone in the Jewish culture would have instantly understood the nature of the office. These twelve men, commissioned as Jesus' apostles, would speak and act with the same authority as the One who sent them. "Apostle" was therefore a title of great respect and privilege.

The Apostles were able to confirm their teaching as true by signs and wonders and mighty deeds (2 Cor. 12:11-12). God gave them miracle power to attest to the validity of their ministry. This was crucial. Why believe an apostle? There was no New Testament to compare him to and if Peter blew into town and taught a lot of things, how would you know he was teaching the truth? How would you know he represented God? The Apostles were granted signs, wonders and mighty deeds from God to attest to the validity of their teaching. If God was

attesting anything, He would be attesting the truest and purest representation of His truth. The apostles taught the truth and God confirmed it by signs and wonders.

The Apostles were the source of the teaching of divine truth. The early church, according to Acts 2, continuously devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and doctrine, along with fellowship, the breaking of bread, and praying. Before the New Testament was complete, the apostles' teaching was the only source of truth about Christ and church doctrine. Their teaching was received with the same authority as the written Word. They framed the doctrine of the church. Furthermore, they were examples of virtue. They are called the "holy apostles" (Eph 3:5 and Rev. 18:20). Their teaching, as recorded in the New Testament, is the only rule by which sound doctrine can be tested, even today. According to Revelation 21:14 the apostles will be eternally honored and rewarded. They have a very special place in eternity. The New Jerusalem will have twelve foundational stones and on them will be the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. These unique men that God called through Christ in that first generation would lay the foundation of the New Testament and most of all the Church, the Body of Christ.

By looking at the four lists of the twelve apostles (Matt 10; Mark 3; Luke 6; Acts 1) Peter's name is at the head of all of them. He was always the one to speak and ask first. Much of the time in the Gospels Peter would be speaking on behalf of the group and we see the other apostles follow Peter. Peter without a doubt was the leader of the apostles.

The first twelve chapters of Acts unfold the early beginnings of the church and the main character is Peter. He's the driving force, he made things happen. Sometimes the right thing, sometimes the wrong thing. But he made things happen.

List of Apostles Weaknesses:

Instead of whitewashing the blemishes of the Apostles, Scripture seems to make a great deal of their human weaknesses. It's a brilliant reminder that "[our] faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor 2:5).

1. They lacked spiritual understanding. Jesus continued to keep teaching them persistently.
2. They lacked humility. They were self-absorbed, self-centered, self-promoting, and proud. Jesus continued to always be an example of humility and servanthood to them.
3. They lacked faith. Jesus kept doing miracles and wonderful works. Most of His miracles were deliberately done in the presence of His disciples so that their faith could be strengthened.

4. The lacked commitment. Jesus kept interceding for them in prayer. John 17 records how He prayed that they would remain ultimately faithful and that the Father would bring them to heaven.
5. They lacked power. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower each of them.

Doctor Luke in Acts 4:13 describes how the people of Jerusalem observed the apostles: “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” The same thing should be said of every true disciple. There is no human explanation for the influence of the apostles and the saints. The glory goes to God alone. The apostles, through the legacy of New Testament Scripture and the testimony they left, are still changing the world even today.

The Making of a True Leader

There are four characteristics which were imperative to appointing and cultivating the twelve apostles.

1. They are Chosen by God: Disciples were coming and going. People were attracted, then disillusioned. On that particular day when Jesus spoke of eating His flesh and drinking His blood recorded in John 6, Jesus even said to the Twelve, “Do you also want to go away?” Peter spoke for the group when he answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Those who stayed were people whom God had sovereignly drawn to His own Son (John 6:44). The sovereignty of His choice is seen in an extraordinary way by the selection of the Twelve. Out of the larger group of disciples, perhaps hundreds of them, He chose twelve men in particular and appointed them to the apostolic office.

2. Raw Material: There are certain obvious features in Peter’s natural disposition that were critical to his leadership ability. These are not generally characteristics that can be developed merely by training they were innate features of Peter’s temperament.

1. Inquisitive – curious. Hungry for answers
2. Initiative – ambitious. Likes to start things
3. Involvement – participates. Always in the middle of action

3. Life Experiences: How did the Lord take a man cut from such rough fabric and refine him into a leader? For one thing, he made sure Peter had the kind of life experiences that formed him into the kind of leader Christ wanted him to be. It is in this sense that true leaders are made, not just born.

Experience can be a hard teacher. In Peter's case the ups and downs of his experiences were dramatic and often painful. The Lord took him through three years of tests and difficulties that gave him a lifetime of the kind of experiences every true leader must endure. Why did Jesus do this? The experiences, even the difficult ones, were all necessary to shape Peter into the man he needed to become. Peter learned how much banter and how little substance there was in him and how watchful and careful he must be to rely only on the Lord's strength. He also learned that in spite of his own sinful tendencies and spiritual weaknesses, the Lord wanted to use, sustain and preserve him no matter what. Peter made the most of his experiences, gleaning from them lessons that helped make him the great leader he became.

4. Character Qualities: The fourth element in the making of a leader is the right character. Character is absolutely critical in leadership. Lasting leadership is grounded in character. Character produces respect. Respect produces trust. And trust motivates followers. Christ is perfect in all the attributes that make up the character of a leader. He is the embodiment of all the truest, purest, highest, and noblest qualities of leadership.

In spiritual leadership, the great goal and objective is to bring people to Christlikeness. That is why the leader himself must manifest Christlike character. Let's look at the character qualities that were developed in Peter's life:

1. Learned submission to authority. By submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, His Word and the Father. He would also submit to those in authority over him such as the government.

Leaders tend to be confident and aggressive, naturally dominating. Peter had that tendency in him. He was always inclined to try to take control of every situation. In order to balance that side of him, the Lord taught him submission as seen in Matthew 17 when Peter was asked if Jesus paid the temple tax.

Peter writes in his first epistle about submission in 1 Peter 2:13-18. Peter would probably be the first one to admit how hard it is to learn submission.

2. Learned to have restraint. Self-control, discipline, moderation, and reserve don't necessarily come naturally to someone who lives life at the head of the pack. That is why so many leaders have problems with anger and out-of-control passions.

Peter had similar tendencies. Hotheadedness goes naturally with the sort of active, decisive, initiative-taking personality that made him a leader in the first place. The scene in the garden where Peter tried to decapitate Malchus is a classic example of his natural lack of restraint. Even surrounded by hundreds of Roman soldiers, all armed to the teeth, Peter

unthinkingly pulled out his sword and was ready to wade into the crowd, swinging. It was fortunate for him that Malchus lost nothing more than an ear and that Jesus immediately healed the damage. As we have already seen, Jesus rebuked Peter sternly. It must have been especially difficult for Peter, to be rebuked in front of a horde of enemies. But that lesson brings us to the next quality.

Peter will teach us about restraint in 1 Peter 2:21-23.

3. Learned humility. Leaders are often tempted by the sin of pride. When people are following your lead, constantly praising you, looking up to you, and admiring you, it is too easy to be overcome with pride.

We can observe in Peter a tremendous amount of self-confidence. We can begin to understand why Jesus took Peter through his time of denial after he had boasted so stubbornly about being resistant to such sins.

Peter will teach us about humility in 1 Peter 5:5-6.

4. Learned to love. All the disciples struggled with learning that true spiritual leadership means loving service to one another. Jesus said, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35).

The Lord Himself constantly modeled that kind of loving servant-leadership for the disciples. Nowhere is it more plainly on display than in the Upper Room on the night of His betrayal when He washed the apostles' feet while they were arguing about who was the greatest. He showed them what loving, humble service for one another looks like. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Matt. 26:34-35).

Peter will teach about loving one another in 1 Peter 4:8.

5. Learned to have compassion. When the Lord warned Peter that he would deny Him, He said, "Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). Jesus would allow Peter to be put to the test. Jesus did reassure Peter that the apostle's faith would survive the ordeal. "I have prayed for you," Jesus told him, "that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (vs. 32). For the rest of his life, Peter would need to show compassion to people who were struggling. He will be well equipped to empathize with other's weaknesses. He had been there. And by that experience he learned to be compassionate, tender-hearted, gracious, kind, and comforting to others who were lacerated by sin and personal failure. He had been to the bottom. His own weaknesses had been thrown in his face. But he had

been perfected, established, strengthened, and settled by the Lord (1 Peter 5:8-10).

Peter will teach us about compassion in 1 Peter 5:8-10.

6. Learned to have courage. Not the impulsive, headlong, false kind of “courage” that caused him to swing his sword so wildly at Malchus, but a mature, settled, valiant willingness to suffer for Christ’s sake.

The kingdom of darkness is set against the kingdom of light. Lies are set against the truth. Satan is set against God. And demons are set against the holy purposes of Christ. The price of preaching would be death for Peter. Persecution. Oppression. Trouble. Torture. Ultimately, martyrdom. Peter would need rock-solid courage to persevere.

Peter will teach us about courage in 1 Peter 1:3-7.

Peter’s Personal Conclusion:

Peter was also married and his wife accompanied him on his apostolic missions. Scripture does not mention if there were children in their family unit.

Peter’s name at birth was Simon Bar-Jonah (Mat. 16:17). Jesus gave Peter another name besides his birth name, “Simon, whom He also named Peter” (Luke 6:14). Jesus didn’t merely give him a new name to replace the old one. He “also” named him Peter: he was known sometimes as Simon, sometimes as Peter, and sometimes as Simon Peter. Peter was a nickname which in Greek means rock or stone. The Aramaic equivalent was Cephas. The first words Jesus spoke to Peter He said, “You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas.” Peter was called Simon in secular or neutral settings, but Jesus also referred to him as Simon when Peter was relying on himself rather than on God. Peter was exactly like most Christians---both carnal and spiritual. He succumbed to the habits of the flesh sometimes; he functioned in the Spirit other times. He was sinful sometimes, but other times he acted the way a righteous man ought to act. This vacillating man, sometimes Simon, sometimes Peter. Peter’s nickname was a perpetual reminder to him about who he could be in Christ. From the beginning of Peter’s journey with Jesus, whatever Jesus called him sent him a subtle message.

As Peter learned all these lessons and his character was transformed---as he became the man Christ wanted him to be---he gradually changed from Simon into Peter the Rock. He learned submission, restraint, humility, love, compassion, and courage from the Lord’s example. And because of the Holy Spirit’s work in his heart, he did become a great leader.

How did Peter’s life end? We know that Jesus told Peter he would die as a martyr (John 21:18-19). But Scripture doesn’t record the death of Peter. All the records of early church history indicate that Peter was crucified. Eusebius cites

the testimony of Clement, who says that before Peter was crucified he was forced to watch the crucifixion of his own wife. As he watched her being led to her death, Clement says, Peter called to her by name, saying, "Remember the Lord." When it was Peter's turn to die, he pleaded to be crucified upside down because he wasn't worthy to die as his Lord had died. And so he was nailed to a cross head-downward.

When Peter writes to the church about faith and trust in the wisdom of God in the midst of suffering, he is speaking not in abstract terms but from the vantage point of one who has been called personally to endure such sufferings himself. He is one who testifies beyond speculation, as one who was an eyewitness, testifying not to cleverly devised myths or fables but to what he had seen with his eyes and heard with his ears. Peter knew that when we are obedient to God's Word despite the world's antagonism, Christians' lives will testify to the truth of the gospel.

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