

From Folly (Foolishness) to Faith: The Apostle¹ Peter



SABBATH—AUGUST 16

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 2:14–40; Acts 3; Acts 5:1–11; 1 Peter; 2 Peter.

MEMORY VERSE: “Simon Peter answered him [Jesus], ‘Lord, who can we go to? You have the words of eternal [forever, without end] life’” (John 6:68, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: The apostle Peter was one of the strongest leaders of the early church. Jesus changed Peter from a disciple (follower) with strong feelings who could not be depended on into a strong leader in the work of sharing the gospel.²

PETER WAS OFTEN TOO QUICK TO ACT. He was a man with very strong feelings and opinions about things. Those facts have made him an interesting study. He was a disciple whose heart was in the right place but who made many mistakes.

Peter's story helps us understand the part emotions play 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. You need something more than what you have naturally.

This is also true with 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 very important part of the Christian life. But emotions are not the most important part. If we are not careful, they can even be dangerous. Peter was someone whose emotions got him into trouble often. But after he made a full surrender³ to Jesus, Peter was a workhorse for the Lord's work. And Peter's emotions became powerful tools for doing his work.

1. apostle—a disciple (follower) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus returned to heaven.

2. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news of salvation.

3. surrender—the act of giving one's whole life to Jesus to love and serve Him and to obey His law.

SUNDAY—AUGUST 17**THE FISHERMAN
(Matthew 4:18–20)**

Peter came from Bethsaida, a fishing village on the northeastern coast of the Sea of Galilee. *Bethsaida* means “house of fishing.” Jesus did many miracles there. For nearly two thousand years, Bethsaida was lost to history. But in 1987, archaeologists⁴ discovered the location of the village.

Peter was married (Matthew 8:14). But 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.

How did Peter answer Jesus’ call in Matthew 4:18–20? What is important about the fact that Peter and Andrew “left their nets” (verse 20, NIV)?

We just have to guess what went through Peter’s mind. Clearly something about Jesus was so powerful that Peter was prepared to leave his home and work to follow this traveling Teacher. The point should be clear to all of us. We need to be ready to do the same thing. We are to follow Jesus no matter the personal cost (read Luke 14:26, 27).

Peter comes from a humble working-class background. Paul’s background is different (Acts 22:3;

Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5; read also Acts 5:34). What point can we learn from this difference?



Peter left his home and work behind to follow Jesus.

Peter and Paul might come from different backgrounds. But the call of Jesus required that both Peter and Paul totally be dedicated to serving Him. Upper class, working class, it does not matter.

Remember 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 answer, and why?

MONDAY—AUGUST 18**PETER’S FOOLISHNESS**

Like the other disciples, Peter had a special opportunity (a chance) to learn from Jesus. Peter walked many miles with Jesus, ate with Him, and worked with Him. He listened to Jesus

4. archaeologists—people who dig to find things from the past that have been buried.

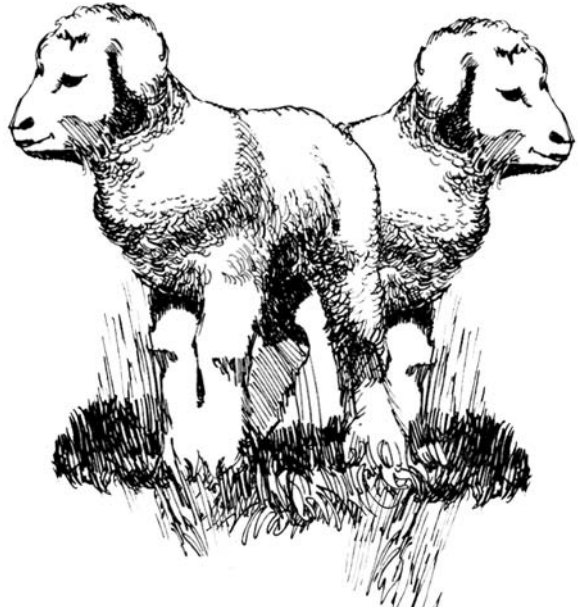
speak, watched the way He worked with people, and saw Him heal the sick. Peter witnessed special events such as the mount of transfiguration.⁵ Peter watched Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah. He saw Jesus raising the dead. He was with Jesus when Jesus was arrested. Peter saw Jesus after He rose from the grave.



Peter watched Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah.

Peter also had many opportunities for useful learning. Often Peter found himself in the middle of experiences

that gave life-changing object lessons.⁶ All these lessons were preparing Peter for his work as one of the great missionaries⁷ of the early church.



Three times Jesus tells Peter to “Feed my sheep” (John 21:14–19).

Through his experiences with Jesus, Peter made many mistakes. Read the mistakes in Matthew 14:22–32; Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:29–31; Mark 14:66–72; and John 18:10, 11. What were the mistakes? What lessons should Peter have learned from them?

Peter was too bold. He liked to act or fight too quickly. He could not stand pressure. He slept on the job. For

5. the mount of transfiguration—the mountain where Jesus’ body shone in glory, and He was seen with Moses and Elijah.

6. object lessons—lessons that use an object to teach a spiritual truth. Most often the object comes from nature, such as grass, a flower, an animal, a tree, or a seashell. But the object used to teach the lesson might be man-made instead.

7. missionaries—persons sent out by a church to spread its religion in a foreign country.

these reasons Peter seemed to be everything that a humble, meek, faithful Christian should not be. But before it was all over, Peter became one of the key leaders in the early Christian church. He was a powerful evangelist⁸ and missionary for Jesus. What powerful, living proof of what God can do in a person who has surrendered (given) his life fully to Jesus.

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

TUESDAY—AUGUST 19

LEARNING FROM JESUS (Matthew 16:13–26)

What does Matthew 16:13–26 tell us about the kind of conversation that took place between Peter and Jesus? Why did Peter answer as he did? What basic lesson was Jesus trying to teach the disciples?

Peter had declared that Jesus was the Messiah (Chosen One), the Christ. But he had a false understanding of what that meant. The view that Peter and the other disciples had about the Messiah showed the common understanding of the day. They believed that the Messiah would come from the line of David and would beat the Romans and bring justice and peace.

But Jesus clearly taught the disciples and the crowds that the kingdom

of God was a spiritual kingdom, not an earthly one. God's kingdom would not be established by power, swords, and daggers. Instead, the disciples would set up God's kingdom by love, forgiveness, and righteousness (living a holy life).

At an important time in His ministry, Jesus decided to tell the disciples about His death. He told them that He would go to Jerusalem, be killed, and rise again after three days. Peter was upset with the idea that Jesus was going to die. Peter did not understand that this death would be a very important part of the plan of salvation.⁹

To Peter's way of thinking, 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 had no place in the dream Peter had painted in his mind. Jesus would set up His kingdom on earth, and Peter would have an important part 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 seems that Peter did not understand Jesus' promise to rise on the third day.

Notice how selfish Peter was here. That probably explains Christ's words in Matthew 16:23–26. Read those verses again. How might you use those words in your own life?

8. evangelist—a Christian who preaches the gospel of Christ to many people at one time.

9. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 20**THE PETER OF ACTS
(Acts 2:14–40)**

Much of the Gospels¹⁰ do not seem to paint Peter in a very positive light. Peter is shown, time and again, falling and making great mistakes. Yet, the Gospels end with a clear picture of the weak disciple's future.

What is Jesus saying to Peter in John 21:14–19? Why is that so surprising when we think about Peter's past?

“Feed My sheep”? That is what Peter comes to do later. Again, what powerful proof of what God can do in the life of someone who gives everything to Him. The hot-tempered Peter now takes a key role in building the early church.

What do Acts 2:14–40; Acts 3; and Acts 5:1–11 tell us about the work of Peter?

The change in Peter was surprising. And the lessons for us should be clear. Peter surrendered himself fully to Christ. So, he became a powerful witness for the Lord. Peter made many mistakes and showed many weaknesses. But the Lord was still able to use Peter as a powerful witness.

How different are you today from

when you first started following Jesus? What progress have you made? What areas need more improvement? The progress may seem slow, but why should you never give up?

THURSDAY—AUGUST 21**THE PETER OF THE EPISTLES
(LETTERS)**

Jesus told Peter, “Feed My sheep.” No doubt the discouraged fisherman had no idea what was coming. He did not know what part he would play in the Lord's church. We have found in Acts that Peter fulfilled Jesus' command. But we also know that this same Peter was the author of two epistles (letters), as well. His great work of “feeding the sheep” was not just for the people in his own time but also for the people in all church history. In a way, every time we read one of Peter's letters, we are taking part in another fulfillment of Christ's words to His disciple (Peter).

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

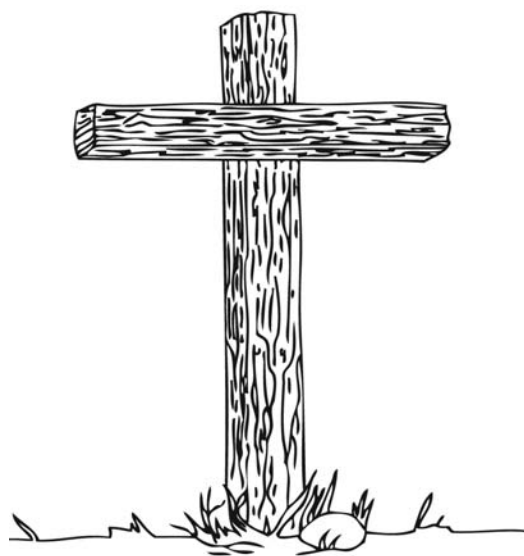
In some ways it is hard to imagine these deep, wise words coming from

10. Gospels—the first four books of the New Testament in the Bible that tell the story of Jesus' life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

the same man seen in the Gospels. He was the same bold fisherman whose mouth ran faster than his mind or his faith. But this is the Peter changed by God's grace¹¹ into what Paul called "a new creature [person]" (2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV).

Peter's words are very powerful in 1 Peter 1:18–21 and in 1 Peter 2:24. In these verses Peter puts focus on the death of Jesus as the way for us to be saved. Peter once decided that Jesus should never go to the cross. But now this same Peter is preaching the Cross as the way for us to be saved. He preaches the Cross as the place where Jesus, our Substitute,¹² accepted our sins. Study, too, the wording of 1 Peter 2:18–23. In these verses Peter is teaching a kind of meek (very humble) surrender. It is a turning of the cheek that one would not have found in the Peter of the Gospels. Truly, the change was very surprising. It should give us all hope, no matter where we are in our own personal character growth.¹³

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



The Cross is the only way for us to be saved.

FRIDAY—AUGUST 22

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, "A Night on the Lake," pages 377–382, in *The Desire of Ages*.

"In his early days as a disciple, Peter thought himself strong. Like the Pharisee,¹⁴ Peter thought that he was 'not as other men are.' On the evening that He was betrayed, Christ forewarned His disciples, 'you will all turn away.' But Peter boldly announced, 'All the others may turn away. But I will not' (Mark 14:27, 29, NIV). Peter did not know his own danger. Boldness

11. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

12. substitute—someone or something that takes the place of another person or thing. Jesus is our Substitute because He died for our sins.

13. character growth—the process of becoming a better person through faith in Jesus. Making good choices, with the help of the Holy Spirit, changes our character or who we are.

14. Pharisee—a person belonging to a religious group of Jesus' day who believed one needed to keep God's laws to be saved.

mised him. Peter thought himself able to keep away from temptation.¹⁵ But in a few short hours the test came, and with cursing and swearing Peter denied his Lord.

“When the cock crowed, it reminded Peter of the words of Christ. Surprised and shocked at what he had just done, Peter turned and looked at his Master. At that moment Christ looked at Peter too. Behind that sad look, mercy and love for Peter were joined together. This look from Jesus also helped Peter to understand himself. He went out and wept bitterly. The look of Christ broke his heart. Peter had come to the turning point. Bitterly Peter repented¹⁶ of his sin. Peter was like the publican [tax collector] in his sorrow and repentance.¹⁷ And like the publican Peter found mercy. The look of Christ told Peter of his pardon.”¹⁸
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 152–154.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Go through Peter’s epistles (letters) and find things in there that show how different a person the new Peter was from the Peter of the

Gospels. What encouragement can you learn from what you find?

❷ It is easy to criticize (find fault with) 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*, page 195. Many followers of Christ lose their early joy for wanting to share with others what they have learned. How can church members regain that desire for sharing the good news? How can you help one another regain this desire for witnessing?

SUMMARY: The story of Peter shows what God can do through even the weakest disciple. Jesus re-directed Peter’s desire and good points and strengthened him in the faith to be a powerful leader of the early Christian church.

15. temptation—anything that can turn us away from God and that tries to get us to do, think, feel, or say what is wrong.

16. repented—to be sorry for sinning and to turn away from sin with the help of the Holy Spirit.

17. repentance—the act of being sorry for having sinned. Repentance also involves turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

18. pardon—to free a person from punishment.