

The Person *of* Peter



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 5:1–11; Matt. 16:13–17; Matt. 14:22–33; Luke 22:31–34, 54–62; Gal. 2:9, 11–14.*

Memory Text: “But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ ” (*Matthew 14:30, 31, NKJV*).

Peter is the author of the two books (*1 and 2 Peter*) that bear his name. He was one of the early followers of Jesus. He remained with Jesus during the Lord's ministry here, and he was one of the first disciples to see the empty tomb. As a result, Peter had a wealth of experiences from which, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he could draw in order to write these powerful letters. “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (*2 Pet. 1:16, NASB*).

Peter appears often in the Gospels, revealing both his triumphs and failures. He was the usual spokesperson of the disciples in their interactions with Jesus. After the Resurrection and Ascension, Peter became a prominent early church leader. The book of Acts talks about him, as does the book of Galatians.

Most important, Peter knew what it was to make mistakes, to be forgiven, and to move forward in faith and humility. Having experienced for himself the grace of God, he remains a powerful voice for all of us who need to experience that same grace, as well.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 1.

Depart From Me!

When we first meet Peter, he is a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee (*Matt. 4:18, Mark 1:16, and Luke 5:1–11*). He had been working all night without catching a fish. But then he and his companions obeyed Jesus' command to return to the lake and to try again. How astonished Peter and the others must have been when they caught so many fish that their boats were sinking. What must have been going through their minds after this miracle?

Read Luke 5:1–9. What do Peter's words to Jesus in Luke 5:8 tell us about Peter? That is, what insights do they give us about where he was spiritually?

Peter must have been impressed by what he knew of Jesus. Even before this miracle, when Jesus told the group to put down the nets, Peter—though incredulous because they had caught nothing—nevertheless said: “‘At Your word I will let down the net’ ” (*NKJV*). It seems that Peter must have known something about Jesus already, and this knowledge impelled him to obey. Indeed, evidence suggests that Peter already had been with Jesus for a while before this event.

Perhaps one key is in Luke 5:3, which talks about what happened before the miracle of the fish. “Then He [Jesus] got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat” (*NKJV*). Maybe the word of Jesus here was what had first impressed Peter so deeply.

However, after the miracle, Peter sensed something more in Jesus, something holy in contrast to his own sinfulness. Peter's realization of his sinfulness, and his willingness to admit it publicly, shows just how open he was to the Lord. No wonder he had been called! Whatever his faults, and they were many, Peter was a spiritual man who was ready to follow the Lord, regardless of the cost.

Read Luke 5:11. What's the crucial principle here? What does this text tell us about what kind of commitment Jesus asks for? What should it tell us, too, that these fishermen were willing to abandon everything when their nets were full?

Confessing the Christ

One of the grand moments in the story of Jesus occurred in a dialogue with Peter. Jesus just had been dealing with some of the scribes and Pharisees who had been challenging Him to give them a sign, something to prove who He was (*see Matt. 16:1–4*). Then, later, alone with the disciples, Jesus talked about the two miracles He had performed, in which He twice fed thousands with just a few loaves and fish. He did all this in the context of warning the disciples about the “leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (*Matt. 16:11*).

Read Matthew 16:13–17. What is happening here? What is the significance of Peter’s words to Jesus?

Peter here spoke boldly of his faith in Jesus. And it’s clear from Matthew 16:20 that his confession of Christ as the Messiah was shared by the others, as well. This was to be a turning point in the ministry of Jesus, even though the disciples, including Peter, had much more to learn.

“The disciples still expected Christ to reign as a temporal prince. Although He had so long concealed His design, they believed that He would not always remain in poverty and obscurity; the time was near when He would establish His kingdom. That the hatred of the priests and rabbis would never be overcome, that Christ would be rejected by His own nation, condemned as a deceiver, and crucified as a malefactor,—such a thought the disciples had never entertained.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 415.

As soon as the disciples recognize Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus begins teaching that He must suffer and die (*see Matt. 16:21–23*), a concept that Peter could not accept. Peter goes as far as to “rebuke” Jesus. Jesus then turns to Peter and says, “ ‘Get behind Me, Satan’ ” (*Matt. 16:23, NKJV*). This is one of the harshest things that He said to anybody during His ministry; yet, He did it for Peter’s own good. Peter’s words reflected his own desires, his own selfish attitude about what he wanted. Jesus had to stop him in his tracks, right then and there (and though Jesus was really speaking to Satan, Peter got the message). Peter needed to learn that serving the Lord would involve suffering. That he learned this lesson is clear in his later writings (*see 1 Pet. 4:12*).

How often do your personal desires clash with what you know God wants you to do? How do you decide what to do in those situations?

Walking on Water

In their time with Jesus, the disciples saw many remarkable things, although few of them can compare with the events described in Matthew 14:13–33, Mark 6:30–52, and John 6:1–21. Jesus used five small loaves of bread and two fish to feed more than 5,000 people. Again, what must have been going on in their minds after seeing something such as this?

Read Matthew 14:22–33. What’s the most crucial message we can take away from this story for ourselves to help us in our own walk with the Lord?

With the feeding of the multitudes, these men had just witnessed the power of Jesus in a remarkable way. He truly had control over the natural world. That must have been what helped Peter make his rather bold, or even presumptuous, request: “ ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water’ ” (*Matt. 14:28, NKJV*).

What an expression of faith!

Jesus, then, acknowledged this faith and told Peter to come, which he did, another expression of Peter’s faith. It would have been one thing to walk on water when it was calm, but Peter did so in the midst of a storm.

The usual lesson of the story is about taking our eyes off Jesus. But there’s more. Peter surely must have trusted in Jesus, or he never would have made the request and then acted on it. However, once he did act, he started to get scared, and in that fear he began to sink.

Why? Could not Jesus have kept Peter afloat regardless of Peter’s fear? Jesus, however, allowed Peter to reach the point where he could do nothing but cry out in his helplessness, “ ‘Lord, save me!’ ” (*Matt. 14:30, NKJV*). Jesus then stretched out His hand and did just what Peter had asked. The fact that “Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him” (*Matt. 14:31, NKJV*), when Jesus could simply have kept him afloat without the physical contact, surely helped Peter realize just how much he had to learn to depend upon Jesus.

We can start out in great faith, trusting in the power of our Lord, but when the situation gets frightful, we need to remember Jesus’ words to Peter: “ ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ ” (*Matt. 14:31, NKJV*).

Denying His Lord

Read Luke 22:31–34, 54–62. What lessons can we learn from Peter’s failures?

Peter’s intentions were good. And, in fact, he showed more courage than did the other disciples. He actually followed Jesus in order to discover what would happen to Him. But in doing so, he decided to hide his true identity. This compromise, this deviation from the path of what is good and right, led him to deny his Lord three times, exactly as Jesus had warned him.

The story of Peter here is in a sad way very instructive on how devastating the result of compromise can be.

As we know, Christian history is soiled with the terrible results that happen when Christians compromise crucial truths. Though life itself often involves compromise, and we must at times be willing to give and take, in crucial truths we must stand firm. As a people, we must learn what are the things that we must never compromise, under any circumstances (*see, for instance, Rev. 14:12*).

According to Ellen G. White, Peter’s compromise and failure began in Gethsemane when, instead of praying, he slept, and thus wasn’t spiritually ready for what was coming. Had he been faithful in prayer, she wrote, “he would not have denied his Lord.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 714.

Yes, Peter failed terribly. But as great as his failure, God’s grace was even greater. “But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (*Rom. 5:20, NKJV*). It was Jesus’ forgiveness that made Peter one of the prime leaders of the early Christian church. What a powerful lesson for us all about the reality of God’s grace. What a lesson to us all that, despite our failures, we should press on ahead in faith!

Yes, Peter knew what it meant to be forgiven. He knew firsthand just what the gospel was all about, because he had experienced not just the reality of his human sinfulness but the greatness and depth of God’s love and grace toward sinners.

How can we learn to forgive those who have greatly disappointed us, as Peter disappointed Jesus here?

Peter as Church Leader

During the ministry of Jesus, Peter often acted in the role of leader of the 12 disciples. He was their usual spokesman. When Matthew lists the disciples, he says “first, . . . Peter” (*Matt. 10:2*). Peter also took a prominent role in the early church. It was Peter who took the initiative to appoint a disciple to replace Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus (*Acts 1:15–25*). On the day of Pentecost, it was Peter who explained to the multitudes that they were seeing the promised gift of the Spirit, poured out by God upon His people (*Acts 2:14–36*). It was Peter who, when arrested for speaking about the resurrection of the dead, spoke to the high priest and the assembled Jewish leaders (*Acts 4:1–12*). It was Peter who was led to Cornelius, the first Gentile to be accepted as a follower of Jesus (*Acts 10:1–48*). It was Peter whom Paul visited for 15 days when Paul first came to Jerusalem after his conversion (*Gal. 1:18*). Indeed, describing the circle of Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem at that time, Paul identifies three “pillars” of the church: Peter, James the brother of Jesus, and John the beloved disciple (*Gal. 2:9*).

Read Galatians 1:18, 19; 2:9, 11–14. What do these texts tell us about Peter, even while he functioned so prominently in the early church?

Even as a church leader, even as someone clearly called of the Lord (Jesus told Peter, “‘Feed my sheep’” [*John 21:17*]), even as the one who received the vision about not calling “any man common or unclean” (*Acts 10:28*), Peter still had some important growing to do.

In the early days of the church, almost all the Christians were Jews, many of whom were “zealous for the law” (*Acts 21:20, NKJV*). In their interpretation of the law, eating with Gentiles was problematic because the Gentiles were considered unclean. When some Jewish Christians came from James at Jerusalem, Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles in Antioch.

For Paul, such behavior was an attack on the gospel itself. He saw Peter’s actions as frank hypocrisy, and he wasn’t afraid to challenge him on it. In fact, Paul used the opportunity to express the key teaching of the Christian faith: justification by faith alone (*see Gal. 2:14–16*).

Though called of God, Peter had some blind spots that needed correcting. How do we respond when others seek to point out our own “blind spots”?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Call by the Sea,” pp. 244–251; “A Night on the Lake,” pp. 377–382, in *The Desire of Ages*.

From the fisherman’s early admission of his own sinfulness to his bold declaration of Jesus that “‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’ ” (*Matt. 16:16, NKJV*) to his terrible denial of his Lord and even to his triumphs and mistakes as a leader in the church, Peter certainly had been a key player. Thus, under the flawless inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he could write what he did, not only from theoretical knowledge but from experience itself. He knew not only the saving grace of Christ but His transforming grace, as well: “Before his [Peter’s] great fall he was always forward and dictatorial, speaking unadvisedly from the impulse of the moment. He was always ready to correct others and to express his mind before he had a clear comprehension of himself or of what he had to say. But Peter was converted, and the converted Peter was very different from the rash, impetuous Peter. While he retained his former fervor, the grace of Christ regulated his zeal. Instead of being impetuous, self-confident, and self-exalted, he was calm, self-possessed, and teachable. He could then feed the lambs as well as the sheep of Christ’s flock.” —Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 334, 335.

Who among us can’t relate in some degree to Peter? Who hasn’t, at times, stood boldly for their faith? And who hasn’t, at times, failed miserably?

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does it tell us about the grace of God that even after such a shameful denial of Jesus, Peter would still come to play such a prominent and important role not just in the early church but in the Christian faith itself? (After all, he wrote part of the New Testament.) What lessons can we take from his restoration about how to deal with those who, in their own way, have failed the Lord?
- 2 In class, talk more about the dangers of compromise for the church. How can we know on what things we need to give and take, and on what things under no circumstances we can compromise? What are examples that we can find in church history of compromise that led to disaster? What lessons can we learn from these events?
- 3 Peter learned some lessons the hard way. From seeing his mistakes, how can we learn the lessons we need to learn but in an easier way than Peter did?

The Canceled Funeral: Part 1

One day after school, I overheard my sister talking to a friend. “But it happened,” a girl said. “The man was dead, and now he’s alive. *How can a dead person come back to life?*” I wondered. Then I said aloud, “That could never happen.”

“It’s the truth,” my sister said. “The man was dead, and now he’s alive.”

I knew that God had raised people from the dead in Bible times. But miracles such as that didn’t happen anymore. Or did they? I knelt and prayed the prayer of Thomas. “Lord, if this is true, let me see it with my own eyes. Then I will believe” (*John 20:25, NIV*).

After a while, I forgot about this strange story about a dead man being raised to life.

When I finished high school, I applied to serve as a Global Mission pioneer before starting college.

A Global Mission pioneer is a layperson chosen by the church, given a small stipend, and asked to move into a community and teach the everlasting gospel while modeling the values of Christianity. Pioneers serve a unique and special role in starting new congregations in new areas among new people groups.

I was assigned to a remote region of central Nigeria where few outsiders ever went and where we had no Seventh-day Adventist believers. I settled in a village and began making friends. Most of the villagers worshiped idols, but some allowed me to share the gospel with them. One teenage girl named One-Ojo seemed especially interested in learning about God. I began studying the Bible with her.

Then one afternoon, a boy ran into my room shouting that One-Ojo was dead. “She died last night,” the boy said. “The family wants you to come before they bury her.”

Dazed, I slipped on my shoes and ran toward One-Ojo’s home. When I arrived, I found her body lying on a straw mat bound hand and foot and ready for burial. I stared at her as I thought about our Bible study just the evening before. *How could she be dead?* I wondered. I touched her arm; it was stiff and cold.

I asked for permission to pray before the family buried her. About twenty people in the room watched as I knelt beside her burial mat and prayed. I asked God to give this girl her life back to teach these people that God is all-powerful.

I had been praying for about an hour when I noticed beads of sweat on One-Ojo’s body. I laid my hand on her arm and felt warmth. Encouraged, I continued praying. Then One-Ojo sneezed.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Luke 5:1–11*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize his or her own inadequacy while trusting in Jesus' power to accomplish His mission.

Feel: Experience gratitude for the privilege of being called by Jesus to work for Him, despite a sense of unworthiness to be in close relationship with Him.

Do: Respond to Jesus' call to become a fisher of men and women, children and youth, willing to leave everything to follow Him.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Jesus Calls for Coworkers in the “Fishing” Business.

A What makes us worthy to become coworkers with Jesus?

B Where does the power come from for bringing souls into the gospel net? How do we connect to the Source of that power?

II. Feel: Unworthy Sinners, Yet Grateful and Obedient

A In what ways do we sense our unworthiness as sinners to be in close relationship with Jesus?

B How can we express gratitude for the privilege of being called to become coworkers with Christ?

III. Do: Answering His Call

A Why is it important when we heed Christ's call to recognize that it is His sufficiency, not our own, that will grant success in His mission?

B Why must we leave everything in order to follow Jesus and fulfill His mission for souls?

▶ **Summary:** Peter's life was dramatically transformed when he realized his true condition as a sinner in the presence of Christ. Peter rendered willing obedience to Jesus' commands and witnessed the power of Christ to accomplish His mission independently of his skills as a professional fisherman. Peter learned that he must trust Christ's sufficiency alone.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Matthew 14:25–33*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Trusting in our own sufficiency leads to danger and despair. Once Peter realizes that his only hope is in Christ and calls out to Him for help, he is able to conquer the waves of despair that threaten his life and soul. Jesus still asks of us, as He did that day of Peter, “Why did you doubt?” (*Matt. 14:31, NKJV*). As the disciples did, we need to respond in worship, saying, “Truly You are the Son of God” (*Matt. 14:33, NKJV*).

Other experiences from the life of Peter also reveal his ongoing struggle with self-sufficiency and his slowness to learn the lesson that Christ tried to teach him. Only when he is humbled and broken after his denial of Jesus is he fully converted. It is then that he submits completely to the sufficiency of Christ, ready to become an instrument in Christ’s hands for the fulfillment of His mission.

Just for Teachers: The goal of this lesson is to lead the class to distrust their own sufficiency and to learn to rely on Christ’s sufficiency.

Opening Activity and Discussion: Have the class read Matthew 14:25–33. Discuss the setting in which this event takes place (*Matt. 14:13–24*) and what Peter should have taken away from these events. Ask the class to consider events in their lives that have tended to lead to self-confidence. Invite them to recall how things turned out before they surrendered themselves to Christ’s leadership and power in their lives. Based on subsequent events in Peter’s life, how effectively does he learn his lesson here? How effectively do we learn the lesson of trusting Christ’s power and sufficiency in our early experiences? Why does Jesus not give up on us just because we don’t learn the first time around?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Several important points are developed in Luke 5:1–11 that need to be emphasized to the students. Whom Jesus calls He equips; the power is from Him. The men He calls are professional fishermen, but He calls them to become apprentice fishers of people, a task for which they are ill-equipped. Jesus provides the evidence that He is the professional at fishing. If those whom He calls trust in Him rather than in their own methods, He will provide them with

a successful catch. They need to acknowledge His deity and their unworthiness. They also need to leave their own tools and methods behind in order to follow Him in humble obedience to His calling and equipping.

Bible Commentary

I. The Call to Service *(Review Luke 5:1–11 with your class.)*

As a professional fisherman, Peter lives his life on the water. He knows what it takes to catch fish, or so he believes. He also knows that people don't walk on water. Jesus overturns all of Peter's knowledge and self-sufficiency. To catch fish effectively one needs to have power over nature. Only Jesus has that power. He demonstrates it by filling Peter's nets with an overwhelming catch of fish after Peter toils all night without catching anything. (Later, Jesus also demonstrates His power again by walking on water.) Peter needs to recognize and acknowledge Jesus' deity and his own unworthiness so that he might work in association with Him (*Luke 5:8*). Peter also needs to learn to trust Jesus when He issues a command or instruction, because the Savior always knows exactly what He is doing and has the power to execute His own will. Peter also needs to leave behind all of his own tools and methods to follow Jesus, apprenticed to the Master Fisher of men and women (*Luke 5:10, 11*).

Consider This: How successful have we been at fishing for souls on our own, using purely human methods? How much more successful would we be if we trusted Christ's methods and power, and why?

II. The Call to Confess Christ *(Review Matthew 16:13–19 with your class.)*

Jesus invites His disciples to confess their awareness of His identity ("Who do you say I am?" [*Matt. 16:15, NIV*]). Peter, ever the brash spokesperson for the others, expresses his confession that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God (*Matt. 16:16*). Jesus declares that Peter could have known this truth only by revelation from the Father (*Matt. 16:17*). This acknowledgment is no credit to Peter, but it underscores the necessity for divine insight in coming to such a conclusion. Unfortunately, Peter seems to have become more confident of, and reliant on, his own correct understanding of Christ and His mission (*Matt. 16:21–23*).

Consider This: How can we be certain that we know Christ's true identity as Messiah? How can we attain a more intimate knowledge of Him and what He is able to accomplish in our lives?

III. The Call to Humility (*Review Matthew 16:21–23 with your class.*)

As Jesus attempts to explain His mission to His disciples, Peter rebukes Jesus: “‘Never, Lord! . . . This shall never happen to you!’” (*Matt. 16:22, NIV*). Peter’s self-confident attitude is sharply reproved by Jesus as being expressive of the spirit of Satan. What does Jesus mean when He says to Peter, “‘You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns’” (*Matt. 16:23, NIV*)? What does Peter seem to have in mind in his rebuke to Jesus? How can we develop a more humble, self-effacing attitude? What does 1 Peter 5:5, 6 reveal that has helped Peter eventually to learn of the importance of humility?

Consider This: In what ways do our expectations of Jesus correspond to His own sense of identity and mission? How do we know when we are ready to learn the lesson of humility?

IV. The Call to Faithfulness (*Review together Matthew 26:31–35, 69–75; Luke 22:31–34.*)

After three and a half years with Jesus, Peter still has not learned his lesson. Peter first denies Jesus’ prediction that all would forsake Him and flee, insisting that he never would do that. Then he denies Jesus Himself, insisting that he does not know Him. When Peter realizes that Jesus knows him better than he knows himself, he finally submits himself fully to God and allows God’s Spirit to control him. This full surrender results in his conversion, placing him in a position to become a spiritual leader for Jesus’ church and the writer of the two epistles that encourage others to be faithful to Jesus.

It is interesting to note that, after Peter has been active as a church leader and apostle for many years, he still exhibits some weaknesses for which he is reproved, according to Paul, in Galatians 2:11–14. Ellen G. White writes concerning this incident: “Peter saw the error into which he had fallen, and immediately set about repairing the evil that had been wrought, so far as was in his power. God, who knows the end from the beginning, permitted Peter to reveal this weakness of character in order that the tried apostle might see that there was nothing in himself whereof he might boast. Even the best of men, if left to themselves, will err in judgment.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 198.

Discussion Questions:

- ① How does Peter’s experience in these events of Matthew 26 and Luke 22 prepare his understanding for writing his two epistles?
- ② In what ways do we identify with Peter’s self-confidence and assertiveness? What will need to happen to us to bring our self-confidence under submission in order that we may learn at the Master’s feet?
- ③ What role does Jesus’ prayer for Peter (*Luke 22:32*) play in his conversion?

How does this prayer enable Peter to strengthen his brethren through the writing of his two epistles? How does knowing that Jesus has prayed for us (*John 17:20*) offer us encouragement and hope?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Remind the class that Peter's experience is not unique to him. He is just bolder and more outspoken in asserting himself in various situations than are his fellow disciples; so he receives more attention in the Gospels. None of the disciples understand what Jesus tells them about His mission (*Luke 9:44, 45*). Just as Elijah (*James 5:17*), they are human beings sharing the same weaknesses that we all do and needing the same divine power for victory over those weaknesses.

Thought Questions:

- ❶ What do I have in common with Peter? What is my potential for good or evil?
- ❷ How can I be strengthened by recalling that Jesus is praying for me, so that when I am converted I can, in turn, strengthen my brothers and sisters?

Activity: Have the class consider praying specifically for those in the church, including their own members who may be struggling with Satan's temptations. Encourage one another to faithfulness.

Alternate Activity: Discuss with the class the call to discipleship (fishing for people) that Jesus makes to Peter, Andrew, James, and John in *Luke 5:1–11* (*compare with Matt. 4:18–22*). Plan a class project that would involve attracting people into the gospel net.

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: We have an opportunity here to relate to Peter's life and experience. Note the ways in which Jesus reaches out to encourage Peter rather than to criticize him for his failures, even in the midst of predicting some of them. What experiences can class members cite as evidence that Jesus is there to encourage them, despite their frequent failures?

Activity: Create a chart, if supplies are available, of the ups and downs, the successes and failures, in Peter's life, as recorded in the New Testament. Alternately, if supplies are not available, ask the class to list these aspects of Peter's life. What pattern emerges? What relation does the pattern have to Peter's conversion experience? How is this instructive for us?