



Who Are The Apostles? Week #10: Embracing Peter

Apostle:

- Those who had witnessed the resurrected Christ.
- Those who were commissioned by Him to spread the gospel into the world.
- Those who had the Holy Spirit work miraculous power through them.

Proverbs 14:25 A true witness delivers souls.

Apostles, symbols of In Christian art, symbols assigned to each of the apostles:

- **Andrew:** X-shaped cross because was crucified on one;
- **Bartholomew:** knife because he was flayed alive with one;
- **James the Greater:** scallop shell, pilgrim staff, or a gourd bottle because he is the patron saint of pilgrims;
- **James the Less:** fuller's pole because he was killed with one;
- **John:** cup with a winged serpent because he drank poison after making a sign of the cross;
- **Judas Iscariot:** bag because he kept money in it;
- **Jude:** club because he was martyred with it;
- **Matthew:** hatchet or halberd because he was killed with it;
- **Matthias:** battleaxe because he was beheaded with it;
- **Paul:** sword because he was beheaded with one;
- **Peter:** bunch of keys because Christ gave him the keys of the kingdom;
- **Simon:** a saw because he was sawn to death;
- **Phillip:** long staff surmounted with a cross because he suffered death by being suspended by the neck from a pillar;
- **Thomas:** lance with which he was pierced through at Mylapore, India.¹

Andrew bar-Jonas

Peter (Simon bar-Jonas)

James bar-Zebedee ("James the Greater")

John bar-Zebedee ("the Beloved Disciple")

Philip

Nathanael or **Bartholomew**

Thomas

Matthew or **Levi** (Son of Alphaeus. James the Less brother?)

James bar-Alphaeus (James the Less)

Thaddaeus or **Lebbaeus** or **Judas** bar-James (Jude)

Simon the Zealot

Judas Iscariot

The order of the list is significant. All the lists of the twelve break them into three groups of four (John does not list them, but tells of their calling in the same groupings). This is clearly consistent with their status within the group.

PATRONAGE:

- A patron was a person who, by their wealth and/or political power, was in a position to bestow favors, protection, and an umbrella of benevolence upon their clients.
- A client was one who received this benevolence and in return owed an obligation of service and loyalty to the patron.

¹ Kurian, G. T. (2001). In *Nelson's new Christian dictionary: the authoritative resource on the Christian world*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.



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Matthew 10:2-4

² The names of the twelve apostles are these: **first, Simon, who is called Peter**, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Mark 3:16-19

¹⁶ He appointed the twelve: **Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter)**; ¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸ Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Luke 6:13-16

¹³ And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: ¹⁴ **Simon, whom he named Peter**, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵ and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶ and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Acts 1:13-14

¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, **Peter** and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

By Way of Reminder:

- The key men in the first and second groups of apostles were originally called at the very onset of Christ's ministry.

Matthew 4:12-22 Jesus Begins His Ministry

¹² Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—

¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,

on them a light has dawned." ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

[John 1:35-42 Jesus Calls the First Disciples

³⁵ The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).

⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).]

Matthew.....Jesus Calls the First Disciples

¹⁸ While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

The first person in the first group—the man who became the spokesman and the overall leader of the group—was (Luke 6:14) "Simon, whom He also named Peter".



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- Full name at birth was Simon Bar-Jonah (Matthew 16:17), meaning **“Simon, son of Jonah”** (John 21:15–17).
- Simon Peter’s father’s name: John (sometimes rendered Jonas or Jonah).
We know nothing more about his parents.
- Simon Peter was a fisherman by trade.
 - He and his brother Andrew were heirs to a family fishing business, centered in Capernaum.
 - They caught fish on the Sea of Galilee.
 - Netting in the evenings.
- The brothers were originally from a small village called Bethsaida on the north shore of the lake (John 1:44),
- They had moved to a larger town nearby called Capernaum (Mark 1:21, 29).
- Capernaum was the major town on the north tip of the Sea of Galilee.
- Jesus made Capernaum His home and the base of His ministry for several months.
- But He pronounced woe on both Capernaum and Bethsaida in Matthew 11:21–24. And those cities are merely ruins today.

The ruins of the synagogue in Capernaum are still visible. Nearby (just a block to the south) archaeologists found the ruins of an ancient church. Early tradition, dating back at least to the third century, claims this church was built over the house of Peter. Indeed, archaeologists have found many signs that Christians in the second century venerated this site. It may very well be the house where Peter lived. It is a short walk from there to the edge of the lake.

- Simon Peter had a wife. We know this because in Luke 4:38 Jesus healed his mother-in-law. The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:5 that Peter took his wife on his apostolic mission.
- That may indicate either that they had no children or that their children were already grown by the time he took his wife. However, Scripture doesn’t expressly say that they had any children. Peter was married. That’s really all we know for certain about his domestic life.
- Peter was the first Christian missionary to the Gentiles, a Christian missionary to the Jews, and a Christian martyr in Rome. Also called Cephas.

Simon: VERY common name - Seven Simons in the Gospel accounts alone.

- Apostles - Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot
- Jesus’ half brother = Simon (Matthew 13:55)
- Judas Iscariot’s father = Simon (John 6:71).
- Jesus had a meal at the home of a man in Bethany named Simon the leper (Matthew 26:6)



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- Another Simon—a Pharisee—hosted Jesus at a similar meal (Luke 7:36–40).
- Man conscripted to carry Jesus’ cross to Calvary = Simon the Cyrene (Matthew 27:32)

WHY? – “Simon, whom He also named Peter” (Luke 6:14).

Peter = Rock (*Petros* is the Greek word for “a piece of rock, a stone.”)

- The Aramaic equivalent was *Cephas* (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Galatians 2:9).
- **John 1:42** describes Jesus’ first face-to-face meeting with Simon Peter: “Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, ‘You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas’ (which is translated, A Stone).”

Those were apparently the first words Jesus ever said to Peter. And from then on, “Rock” was his nickname.

Simon =

- Sometimes, however, the Lord continued to refer to him as Simon anyway. **WHY?**

ASK:

#1.) If you had to **outline** Simon Peter’s personality what would you say?

#2.) How would you define from each of these scriptural examples:
Simon Peter is.....

John 13:3-11 (Brash from Impulsivity)

³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” ⁷ Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” ⁸ Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

Matthew 14:22-33 (Lacking in Faith?)

Jesus Walks on the Water

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

²⁸ And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹ He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did



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you doubt?”³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Matthew 26:50-52 History states this was Peter (Uncontrolled, Too emotional)

Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.⁵¹ And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear.⁵² Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

Matthew 26:30-35 (Undependable, Unfaithful, Immature)

Jesus Foretells Peter's Denial

³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.³¹ Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’³² But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”³³ Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.”³⁴ Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”³⁵ Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.

Peter Denies Jesus

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.”⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.”⁷¹ And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.”⁷² And again he denied it with an oath: “I do not know the man.”⁷³ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.”⁷⁴ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” And immediately the rooster crowed.⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

Acts 10

Peter and Paul – Gentiles! (Double minded. Hypocritical/Disingenuous)

Acts 10 – vision of eating ‘unclean things’ – Peter goes to Cornelius, the Gentile’s home. They all get saved

Acts 10:44-48

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared,⁴⁷ “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Galatians 2:11-12

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party

WHY nickname him ROCK?



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- Simon Peter was the leader of the apostles—and not only from the fact that his name heads every list of the Twelve.
- **Matthew 10:2:** “Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter.”
 - The word translated “first” in that verse is the **Greek term *protos***. It doesn’t refer to the first in a list; **it speaks of the chief, the leader of the group.**
 - Peter’s leadership is further evident in the way he normally acts as spokesman for the whole group. He is always in the foreground, taking the lead. He seems to have had a naturally dominant personality, and the Lord put it to good use among the Twelve.

*It was, after all, the Lord who chose him to be the leader. Peter was formed and equipped by God’s sovereign design to be the leader. Moreover, Christ Himself shaped and trained Peter to be the leader. **Therefore when we look at Peter, we see how God builds a leader.***

PART II: How would you respond if Jesus said this to you:

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

- Peter’s name is mentioned in the Gospels more than any other name except Jesus.
- No one speaks as often as Peter, and no one is spoken to by the Lord as often as Peter.
- No disciple is so frequently rebuked by the Lord as Peter;
- and no disciple ever rebukes the Lord except Peter (Matthew 16:22).
- No one else confessed Christ more boldly or acknowledged His lordship more explicitly;
- yet no other disciple ever verbally denied Christ as forcefully or as publicly as Peter did.
- No one is praised and blessed by Christ the way Peter was;
- yet Peter was also the only one Christ ever addressed as Satan.
- The Lord had harsher things to say to Peter than He ever said to any of the others.

All of that contributed to making him the leader Christ wanted him to be.
Studying Peter will reorient how we define intimacy with Christ



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NOTes:

Introduction to Peter

Simon Peter is one of Jesus' first disciples and later becomes the spokesman of the Twelve. Although Jesus gives Simon the name "Peter" ("rock"; Πέτρος, *Petros*; in Matt 16:18; Mark 3:16; Κηφᾶς, *Kēphas*; in John 1:42), his ability to live up to it is often in doubt in the Gospels. Peter's rebuke of the Lord (Matt 16:22–23; Mark 8:32–33), his falling asleep in the garden (Matt 26:40; Mark 14:37), his attack on Malchus (Mark 14:47; John 18:10–11), and his denial of Jesus (Matt 26:69–75; Mark 14:66–72; Luke 22:55–61; John 18:15–27) all support this perception. However, Jesus' reinstatement of Peter in John 21:15–17 ("Do you love Me ... feed My sheep") communicates His confidence in and selection of him as the head of the early church. Luke demonstrates this in the book of Acts, which portrays Peter as a bold proclaimer of the gospel (Acts 2:14–41; 3:12–26; 4:8–21), a miracle worker (Acts 3:1–11; 9:32–35, 38–42), an authoritative figure in the early church (Acts 1:15–26; 5:3–10; 8:14–17; 15:7–11), the first missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1–45), and a missionary to the Jews outside of Jerusalem (Acts 12:17). Ultimately, Peter demonstrates his total devotion as a follower of Jesus when he dies a martyr's death in Rome (1 Clement 5:4).

LEADER:

We see in Peter's life three key elements that go into the making of a true leader:
the right raw material
the right life experiences
the right character qualities

- I. **The first one is *inquisitiveness*.** When you're looking for a leader, you want someone who asks lots of questions. People who are not inquisitive simply don't make good leaders. Curiosity is crucial to leadership. People who are content with what they don't know, happy to remain ignorant about what they don't understand, complacent about what they haven't analyzed, and comfortable living with problems they haven't solved—such people cannot lead. Leaders need to have an insatiable curiosity. They need to be people who are hungry to find answers. Knowledge is power. Whoever has the information has the lead. If you want to find a leader, look for someone who is asking the right questions and genuinely looking for answers.

In the Gospel accounts, Peter asks more questions than all the other apostles combined. It was usually Peter who asked the Lord to explain His difficult sayings (Matthew 15:15; Luke 12:41). It was Peter who asked how often he needed to forgive (Matthew 18:21). It was Peter who asked what reward the disciples would get for having left everything to follow Jesus (Matthew 19:27). It was Peter who asked about the withered fig tree (Mark 11:21). It was Peter who asked



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questions of the risen Christ (John 21:20–22). He always wanted to know more, to understand better. And that sort of inquisitiveness is a foundational element of a true leader.

- II. Another necessary ingredient is **initiative**. If a man is wired for leadership, he will have drive, ambition, and energy. A true leader must be the kind of person who makes things happen. He is a starter. Notice that Peter not only *asked* questions; he was also usually the first one to *answer* any question posed by Christ. He often charged right in where angels fear to tread.

There was that famous occasion when Jesus asked, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (Matthew 16:13). Several opinions were circulating among the people about that. “So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets’ ” (v. 14). Jesus then asked the disciples in particular, “But who do *you* say that I am?” (v. 15, emphasis added). It was at that point that Peter boldly spoke out above the rest: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). The other disciples were still processing the question, like schoolboys afraid to speak up lest they give the wrong answer. Peter was bold and decisive. That’s a vital characteristic of all great leaders. Sometimes he had to take a step back, undo, retract, or be rebuked. But the fact that he was always willing to grab opportunity by the throat marked him as a natural leader.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, when Roman soldiers from Fort Antonia came to arrest Jesus, all three synoptic Gospel writers say there was a “great multitude” armed with “with swords and staves” (Matthew 26:47; cf. Mark 14:43; Luke 22:47). A typical Roman cohort consisted of six hundred soldiers, so in all likelihood there were hundreds of battle-ready Roman troops in and around the garden that night. Without hesitating, Peter pulled out his sword and took a swing at the head of Malchus, the servant of the high priest. (The high priest and his personal staff would have been in the front of the mob, because he was the dignitary ordering the arrest.) Peter was undoubtedly trying to cut the man’s head off. But Peter was a fisherman, not a swordsman. Malchus ducked, and his ear was severed. So Jesus “touched his ear and healed him” (Luke 22:51). Then He told Peter, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52). (Thus He affirmed the equity of capital punishment as a divine law.)

Think about that incident. There was an entire detachment of Roman soldiers there—perhaps numbering in the hundreds. What did Peter think he was going to do? Behead them all, one by one? Sometimes in Peter’s passion for taking the initiative, he overlooked the obvious big-picture realities.

But with all his brashness, Peter had the raw material from which a leader could be made. Better to work with a man like that than to try to motivate someone who is always passive and hesitant. As the familiar saying goes, it is much easier to tone down a fanatic than to resurrect a corpse. Some people have to be dragged tediously in any forward direction. Not Peter. He always wanted to move ahead. He wanted to know what he didn’t know. He wanted to understand what he didn’t understand. He was the first to ask questions and the first to try to answer questions. He was a man who always took the initiative, seized the moment, and charged ahead. That’s the stuff of leadership.

Remember, these characteristics are only the raw material from which a leader is made. Peter needed to be trained and shaped and matured. But to do the task Christ had for him, he needed



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moxie, chutzpa—courage to stand up in Jerusalem on Pentecost and preach the gospel in the face of the same population who had lately executed their own Messiah. But Peter was just the sort of fellow who could be trained to take that kind of courageous initiative.

- III. There's a third element of the raw material that makes a true leader: **involvement**. True leaders are always in the middle of the action. They do not sit in the background telling everyone else what to do while they live a life of comfort away from the fray. A true leader goes through life with a cloud of dust around him. That is precisely why people follow him. People cannot *follow* someone who remains distant. The true leader must show the way. He goes before his followers into the battle.

Jesus came to the disciples one night out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, walking on the water in the midst of a violent storm. Who out of all the disciples jumped out of the boat? Peter. *There's the Lord*, he must have thought. *I'm here; I've got to go where the action is*. The other disciples wondered if they were seeing a ghost (Matthew 14:26). But Peter said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." Jesus answered, "Come" (vv. 27–28)—and before anyone knew it, Peter was out of the boat, walking on the water. The rest of the disciples were still clinging to their seats, trying to make sure they didn't fall overboard in the storm. But Peter was out of the boat without giving it a second thought. That is involvement—*serious* involvement. Only after he left the boat and walked some distance did Peter think about the danger and start to sink.

People often look at that incident and criticize Peter's lack of faith. But let's give him credit for having faith to leave that boat in the first place. Before we disparage Peter for the weakness that almost brought him down, we ought to remember where he was when he began to sink.

Similarly, although Peter denied Christ, keep in mind one significant fact: He and one other disciple (probably his lifelong friend, John) were the only ones who followed Jesus to the high priest's house to see what would become of Jesus (John 18:15). And in the courtyard of the high priest's house, Peter was the only one close enough for Jesus to turn and look him in the eyes when the rooster crowed (Luke 22:61). Long after the other disciples had forsaken Christ and fled in fear for their lives, Peter was virtually alone in a position where such a temptation could snare him, because despite his fear and weakness, he couldn't abandon Christ completely. That's the sign of a true leader. When almost everyone else bailed out, he tried to stay as close to his Lord as he could get. He wasn't the kind of leader who is content to send messages to the troops from afar. He had a passion to be personally involved, so he is always found close to the heart of the action.

That was the raw fabric of which Peter was made: an insatiable inquisitiveness, a willingness to take the initiative, and a passion to be personally involved. Now it was up to the Lord to train and shape him, because frankly, that kind of raw material, if not submitted to the Lord's control, can be downright dangerous.

The apostle Peter learned a lot through hard experience. He learned, for example, that crushing defeat and deep humiliation often follow hard on the heels of our greatest victories. Just after Christ commended him for his great confession in Matthew 16:16 ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"), Peter suffered the harshest rebuke ever recorded of a disciple in the New



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Testament. One moment Christ called Peter blessed, promising him the keys of the kingdom (vv. 17–19). In the next paragraph, Christ addressed Peter as Satan and said, “Get behind me!” (v. 23)—meaning, “Don’t stand in My way!”

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.

1 Peter 5:12

That this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.

Personal Application: How open am I to God’s hand moving my life into the spaces that shape me into who He is calling me to be?

What I am embracing in Peter:

*Did Peter learn to love? He certainly did. Love became one of the hallmarks of his teaching. In **1 Peter 4:8** he wrote, “Above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’” The Greek word translated “fervent” in that verse is *ektenes*, literally meaning “stretched to the limit.” Peter was urging us to love to the maximum of our capacity. The love he spoke of is not about a feeling. It’s not about how we respond to people who are naturally lovable. It’s about a love that covers and compensates for others’ failures and weaknesses: “Love will cover a multitude of sins.” This is the sort of love that washes a brother’s dirty feet. Peter himself had learned that lesson from Christ’s example.*

NOteS

FISH, Three types:

- **Sardines:** The “small fish” mentioned in John 6:9 in connection with the feeding of the five thousand are **sardines**. Sardines and a kind of flat bread were the staples of the region.
- **Barbels** (because of the fleshy filaments at the corners of their mouths) are a kind of carp and hence are somewhat bony, but they can grow to be very large—weighing as much as fifteen pounds. (A barbel was probably the kind of fish Peter caught with a coin in its mouth in Matthew 17:27, because it is the only fish in the Sea of Galilee large enough to swallow a coin and also be caught on a hook.)



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- **Musht**—a type of fish that swims and feeds in shoals and has a comblike dorsal fin. Musht of edible size range from six inches to a foot and a half long. Fried musht are still served in restaurants near the Sea of Galilee and are popularly known today as “St. Peter’s Fish.”

Peter in the Gospels

References to Peter in the Gospels are numerous and often attest to his prominence among the Twelve:

Peter is called to leave everything and follow Jesus	Matt 4:18–20; Luke 5:1–11
Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law	Matt 8:14–15; Mark 1:30–31; Luke 4:38–39
Peter is the first disciple named in the lists of the Twelve	Matt 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16
Peter is the spokesperson when Jesus is touched by the bleeding woman	Luke 8:45
Peter, along with James and John, at the raising of Jarius’ daughter	Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51
Peter walks on the water	Matt 14:28–31
Peter’s confession after many disciples have turned away	John 6:66–69
Peter asks Jesus to explain a parable	Matt 15:15
Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah	Matt 16:13–19; Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:18–21
Jesus rebukes Peter	Matt 16:21–23; Mark 8:31–33
Peter with Jesus at the transfiguration	Matt 17:1–9; Mark 9:1–9; Luke 9:27–36
Jesus involves Peter in the questioning of the temple tax	Matt 17:24–27
Peter asks Jesus about the extent of forgiveness	Matt 18:21–22



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Peter as spokesman for himself and the disciples, claiming to have left everything to follow Jesus Matt 19:27–30; Mark 10:28–31; Luke 18:28–30

Peter remembers the withered fig tree Mark 11:20–25

Peter and John are sent to prepare the Passover meal Luke 22:7–13

Peter's response as Jesus attempts to wash his feet John 13:6–11

Jesus foretells Peter's denial Matt 26:31–35; Mark 14:27–31; Luke 22:31–34; John 13:36–38

Peter sleeps in the garden of Gethsemane Matt 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42

Peter attacks the servant of the high priest at Jesus' arrest Mark 14:47; John 18:10–11

Peter denies Jesus Matt 26:69–75; Mark 14:66–72; Luke 22:55–61; John 18:15–27

Peter is informed of Jesus' arrival in Galilee Mark 16:7

Peter runs to the tomb of Jesus to discover that it is empty Luke 24:12

Cleopas and another disciple learn that Jesus has appeared to Peter Luke 24:34

Peter catches fish at the encouragement of Jesus John 21:3–14

Peter is reinstated by Jesus John 21:15–19



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2

PETER—THE APOSTLE WITH THE FOOT-SHAPED MOUTH

And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

—LUKE 22:31–32

We have four lists of the twelve apostles in the New Testament: Matthew 10:2–4, Mark 3:16–19, Luke 6:13–16, and Acts 1:13. Here’s how the list appears in Luke’s Gospel: “He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.”

In all four biblical lists, the same twelve men are named, and the order in which they are given is strikingly similar. The first name in all four lists is Peter. He thus stands out as the leader and spokesman for the whole company of twelve. The Twelve are then arranged in three groups of four. Group one always has Peter at the head of the list, and that group always includes Andrew, James, and John. Group two always features Philip first and includes Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas. Group three is always led by James the son of Alphaeus, and it includes Simon the Zealot; Judas son of James (called “Thaddeaus” in Mark and “Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddeaus” in Matthew); and finally, Judas Iscariot. (Judas Iscariot is omitted from the list in Acts 1 because he was already dead by then. In the three lists where Judas’s name is included, it always appears last, along with a remark identifying him as the traitor.)

The three names at the head of each group seem to have been the group leaders. The three groups always appear in the same order: first Peter’s group, then the group led by Philip, then the group headed by James.

Matthew 10:2–4	Mark 3:16–19	Luke 6:14–16	Acts 1:13
Peter	Peter	Peter	Peter
Andrew	James	Andrew	James
James	John	James	John
John	Andrew	John	Andrew
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew



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James (son of Alphaeus)	James (son of Alphaeus)	James (son of Alphaeus)	James (son of Alphaeus)
Lebbaeus (surn. Thaddeus)	Thaddeus	Simon	Simon
Simon	Simon	Judas (son of James)	Judas (son of James)
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	

The groups appear to be listed in descending order based on their level of intimacy with Christ. The members of group one were in all likelihood the first disciples Jesus called to Himself (John 1:35–42). Therefore they had been with Him the longest and occupied the most trusted position in His inner circle. They are often seen together in the presence of Christ at key times. Of the four in the first group, three—Peter, James, and John—form an even closer inner circle. Those three are with Jesus at major events in His ministry when the other apostles are either not present or not as close. The three in the inner circle were together, for example, on the Mount of Transfiguration and in the heart of the Garden of Gethsemane (cf. Matthew 17:1; Mark 5:37; 13:3; 14:33).

Group two does not have such a high profile, but they are still significant figures in the Gospel accounts. Group three is more distant, and they are rarely mentioned in the narrative accounts of Jesus’ ministry. The only member of group three we know much about is Judas Iscariot—and we know him only because of his treachery at the very end. So although there were twelve apostles, only three seem to have had the most intimate relationship with Christ. The others seemed to enjoy somewhat lesser degrees of personal familiarity with Him.

This suggests that even a relatively small group of twelve is too large for one person to maintain the closest intimacy with each group member. Jesus kept three men very close to Him—Peter, James, and John. Next came Andrew, and then the others, obviously in declining degrees of close friendship. If Christ in His perfect humanity could not pour equal amounts of time and energy into everyone He drew around Him, no leader should expect to be able to do that.

The Twelve were an amazingly varied group. Their personalities and interests swept the spectrum. The four in group one seem to be the only ones tied together by common denominators. They were all four fishermen, they were two sets of brothers, they came from the same community, and they had apparently all been friends for a long time. By contrast, Matthew was a tax collector and a loner. Simon was a Zealot—a political activist—and a different kind of loner. The others all came from unknown occupations.

They all had vastly differing personalities. Peter was eager, aggressive, bold, and outspoken—with a habit of revving his mouth while his brain was in neutral. I have often referred to him as the apostle with the foot-shaped mouth. John, on the other hand, spoke very little. In the first twelve chapters of Acts, he and Peter are constant companions, but no words of John are ever recorded. Bartholomew (also known sometimes as Nathanael), was a true believer, openly



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confessing his faith in Christ and quick to have faith (cf. John 1:47–50). Significantly, he is in the same group as (and sometimes paired with) Thomas, who was an outspoken skeptic and doubter and wanted to have proof for everything.

Their political backgrounds were different, too. Matthew, the former tax collector (who was sometimes called Levi), was considered one of the most despicable people in Israel before Jesus called him. He had taken a job with the Roman government to extort taxes from his own people—and that tax money went to pay for the Roman occupation army. The lesser-known of the two Simons, on the other hand, is called “the Zealot” in Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13. Zealots were an outlaw political party who took their hatred of Rome to an extreme and conspired to overthrow Roman rule. Many of them were violent outlaws. Since they did not have an army, they used sabotage and assassination to advance their political agenda. They were, in effect, terrorists. One faction of the Zealots was known as *sicarii* (literally, “dagger-men”) because of the small, curved blades they carried. They concealed those weapons beneath their robes and used them to dispatch people they perceived as political enemies—people like tax collectors. Roman soldiers were also favorite targets for their assassinations. The *sicarii* usually staged these acts of execution at public functions in order to heighten fear. That Matthew, a former tax collector, and Simon, a former Zealot, could be part of the same company of twelve apostles is a testimony to the life-changing power and grace of Christ.

It is interesting that the key men in the first and second groups of apostles were originally called at the very outset of Christ’s ministry. John 1:35–42 describes how Jesus called John and Andrew. They, in turn, on that very same day, brought Peter, who was Andrew’s brother. James, the remaining member of that group, was John’s brother, so it was undoubtedly Andrew and John who brought him to Christ, too. In other words, the first group’s association with Jesus went back to the very start of His public ministry.

John 1:43–51 likewise describes the calling of Philip and Nathanael (also known as Bartholomew). They were called “the following day” (v. 43). So that group also had a history that went back to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. These were men who had known Jesus well and followed Him closely for a long time.

The first person in the first group—the man who became the spokesman and the overall leader of the group—was “Simon, whom He also named Peter” (Luke 6:14).

“SIMON ... ALSO NAMED PETER”

Simon was a very common name. There are at least seven Simons in the Gospel accounts alone. Among the Twelve were two named Simon (Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot). In Matthew 13:55, Jesus’ half brothers are listed, and one of them was also named Simon. Judas Iscariot’s father was called Simon as well (John 6:71). Matthew 26:6 mentions that Jesus had a meal at the home of a man in Bethany named Simon the leper. Another Simon—a Pharisee—hosted Jesus at a similar meal (Luke 7:36–40). And the man conscripted to carry Jesus’ cross partway to Calvary was Simon the Cyrene (Matthew 27:32).

Our Simon’s full name at birth was Simon Bar-Jonah (Matthew 16:17), meaning “Simon, son of Jonah” (John 21:15–17). Simon Peter’s father’s name, then, was John (sometimes rendered Jonas or Jonah). We know nothing more about his parents.



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But notice that the Lord gave him another name. Luke introduces him this way: “Simon, whom He also named Peter” (Luke 6:14). Luke’s choice of words here is important. Jesus didn’t merely give him a new name to replace the old one. He “also” named him Peter. This disciple was known sometimes as Simon, sometimes as Peter, and sometimes as Simon Peter.

“Peter” was a sort of nickname. It means “Rock.” (Petros is the Greek word for “a piece of rock, a stone.”) The Aramaic equivalent was Cephas (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Galatians 2:9). John 1:42 describes Jesus’ first face-to-face meeting with Simon Peter: “Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, ‘You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas’ (which is translated, A Stone).” Those were apparently the first words Jesus ever said to Peter. And from then on, “Rock” was his nickname.

Sometimes, however, the Lord continued to refer to him as Simon anyway. When you see that in Scripture, it is often a signal that Peter has done something that needs rebuke or correction.

The nickname was significant, and the Lord had a specific reason for choosing it. By nature Simon was brash, vacillating, and undependable. He tended to make great promises he couldn’t follow through with. He was one of those people who appears to lunge wholeheartedly into something but then bails out before finishing. He was usually the first one in; and too often, he was the first one out. When Jesus met him, he fit James’s description of a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (James 1:8). Jesus changed Simon’s name, it appears, because He wanted the nickname to be a perpetual reminder to him about who he should be. And from that point on, whatever Jesus called him sent him a subtle message. If He called him Simon, He was signaling him that he was acting like his old self. If He called him Rock, He was commending him for acting the way he ought to be acting.

Tommy Lasorda, former manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers, tells the story of a young, skinny pitcher who was new in the Dodgers’ minor league system. The youngster was somewhat timid but had an extraordinarily powerful and accurate arm. Lasorda was convinced that the young pitcher had the potential to be one of the greatest ever. But, Lasorda says, the young man needed to be more fierce and competitive. He needed to lose his timidity. So Lasorda gave him a nickname that was exactly the opposite of his personality: “Bulldog.” Over the years, that is exactly what Orel Hershiser became—one of the most tenacious competitors who ever took the mound in the major leagues. **The nickname became a perpetual reminder of what he ought to be, and before long, it shaped his whole attitude.**

This young man named Simon, who would become Peter, was impetuous, impulsive, and overeager. He needed to become like a rock, so that is what Jesus named him. From then on, the Lord could gently chide or commend him just by using one name or the other.

After Christ’s first encounter with Simon Peter, we find two distinct contexts in which the name Simon is regularly applied to him. One is a *secular* context. When Scripture refers to his house, for example, it’s usually “Simon’s house” (Mark 1:29; Luke 4:38; Acts 10:17). When it speaks of his mother-in-law, it does so in similar terms: “Simon’s wife’s mother” (Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38). Luke 5, describing the fishing business, mentions “one of the boats, which was Simon’s” (v. 3)—and Luke says James and John were “partners with Simon” (v. 10). All of those expressions refer to Simon by his given name in purely secular contexts. When he is called Simon in such a context, the use of his old name usually has nothing to do with his spirituality or his character.



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That is just the normal way of signifying what pertained to him as a natural man—his work, his home, or his family life. These are called “Simon’s” things.

The second category of references where he is called Simon is seen whenever Peter was displaying the characteristics of his unregenerate self—when he was sinning in word, attitude, or action. Whenever he begins to act like his old self, Jesus and the Gospel writers revert to calling him Simon. In Luke 5:5, for example, Luke writes, “Simon answered and said to Him, ‘Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.’ ” That is young Simon the fisherman speaking. He is skeptical and reluctant. But as he obeys and his eyes are opened to who Jesus really is, Luke begins to refer to him by his new name. Verse 8 says, “When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’ ”

We see Jesus calling him Simon in reference to the key failures in his career. In Luke 22:31, foretelling Peter’s betrayal, Jesus said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.” Later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Peter should have been watching and praying with Christ, he fell asleep. Mark writes, “[Jesus] came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak’ ” (Mark 14:37–38). Thus usually when Peter needed rebuke or admonishment, Jesus referred to him as Simon. It must have reached the point where whenever the Lord said “Simon,” Peter cringed. He must have been thinking, *Please call me Rock!* And the Lord might have replied, “I’ll call you Rock when you act like a rock.”

It is obvious from the Gospel narratives that the apostle John knew Peter very, very well. They were lifelong friends, business associates, and neighbors. Interestingly, in the Gospel of John, John refers to his friend fifteen times as “Simon Peter.” Apparently John couldn’t make up his mind which name to use, because he saw both sides of Peter constantly. So he simply put both names together. In fact, “Simon Peter” is what Peter calls himself in the address of his second epistle: “Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). In effect, he took Jesus’ nickname for him and made it his surname (cf. Acts 10:32).

After the resurrection, Jesus instructed His disciples to return to Galilee, where He planned to appear to them (Matthew 28:7). Impatient Simon apparently got tired of waiting, so he announced that he was going back to fishing (John 21:3). As usual, the other disciples dutifully followed their leader. They got into the boat, fished all night, and caught nothing.

But Jesus met them on the shore the following morning, where He had prepared breakfast for them. The main purpose of the breakfast meeting seemed to be the restoration of Peter (who, of course, had sinned egregiously by denying Christ with curses on the night the Lord was betrayed). Three times Jesus addressed him as Simon and asked, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” (John 21:15–17). Three times, Peter affirmed his love.

That was the last time Jesus ever had to call him Simon. A few weeks later, on Pentecost, Peter and the rest of the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit. It was Peter, the Rock, who stood up and preached that day.

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



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other times he acted the way a righteous man ought to act. This vacillating man—sometimes Simon, sometimes Peter—was the leader of the Twelve.

“FOLLOW ME, AND I WILL MAKE YOU FISHERS OF MEN”

Simon Peter was a fisherman by trade. He and his brother Andrew were heirs to a family fishing business, centered in Capernaum. They caught fish on the Sea of Galilee. Commercial fishermen on that lake in Jesus’ day caught three types of fish. The “small fish” mentioned in John 6:9 in connection with the feeding of the five thousand are sardines. Sardines and a kind of flat bread were the staples of the region. Another kind of fish, known as barbels (because of the fleshy filaments at the corners of their mouths) are a kind of carp and hence are somewhat bony, but they can grow to be very large—weighing as much as fifteen pounds. (A barbel was probably the kind of fish Peter caught with a coin in its mouth in Matthew 17:27, because it is the only fish in the Sea of Galilee large enough to swallow a coin and also be caught on a hook.) The third and most common type of commercial fish are musht—a type of fish that swims and feeds in shoals and has a comblike dorsal fin. Musht of edible size range from six inches to a foot and a half long. Fried musht are still served in restaurants near the Sea of Galilee and are popularly known today as “St. Peter’s Fish.”

Simon and Andrew spent their nights netting those fish. The brothers were originally from a small village called Bethsaida on the north shore of the lake (John 1:44), but they had moved to a larger town nearby called Capernaum (Mark 1:21, 29).

In Jesus’ day, Capernaum was the major town on the north tip of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus made Capernaum His home and the base of His ministry for several months. But He pronounced woe on both Capernaum and Bethsaida in Matthew 11:21–24. And those cities are merely ruins today. The ruins of the synagogue in Capernaum are still visible. Nearby (just a block to the south) archaeologists found the ruins of an ancient church. Early tradition, dating back at least to the third century, claims this church was built over the house of Peter. Indeed, archaeologists have found many signs that Christians in the second century venerated this site. It may very well be the house where Peter lived. It is a short walk from there to the edge of the lake.

Simon Peter had a wife. We know this because in Luke 4:38 Jesus healed his mother-in-law. The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:5 that Peter took his wife on his apostolic mission. That may indicate either that they had no children or that their children were already grown by the time he took his wife. However, Scripture doesn’t expressly say that they had any children. Peter was married. That’s really all we know for certain about his domestic life.

We know Simon Peter was the leader of the apostles—and not only from the fact that his name heads every list of the Twelve. We also have the explicit statement of Matthew 10:2: “Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter.” The word translated “first” in that verse is the Greek term protos. It doesn’t refer to the first in a list; it speaks of the chief, the leader of the group. Peter’s leadership is further evident in the way he normally acts as spokesman for the whole group. He is always in the foreground, taking the lead. He seems to have had a naturally dominant personality, and the Lord put it to good use among the Twelve.



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It was, after all, the Lord who chose him to be the leader. Peter was formed and equipped by God's sovereign design to be the leader. Moreover, Christ Himself shaped and trained Peter to be the leader. Therefore when we look at Peter, we see how God builds a leader.

Peter's name is mentioned in the Gospels more than any other name except Jesus. No one speaks as often as Peter, and no one is spoken to by the Lord as often as Peter. No disciple is so frequently rebuked by the Lord as Peter; and no disciple ever rebukes the Lord except Peter (Matthew 16:22). No one else confessed Christ more boldly or acknowledged His lordship more explicitly; yet no other disciple ever verbally denied Christ as forcefully or as publicly as Peter did. No one is praised and blessed by Christ the way Peter was; yet Peter was also the only one Christ ever addressed as Satan. The Lord had harsher things to say to Peter than He ever said to any of the others.

All of that contributed to making him the leader Christ wanted him to be. God took a common man with an ambivalent, vacillating, impulsive, unsubmitive personality and shaped him into a rocklike leader—the greatest preacher among the apostles and in every sense the dominant figure in the first twelve chapters of Acts, where the church was born.

We see in Peter's life three key elements that go into the making of a true leader: the right raw material, the right life experiences, and the right character qualities. Let me show you exactly what I mean.

THE RAW MATERIAL THAT MAKES A TRUE LEADER

There is an age-old debate about whether true leaders are born or made. Peter is a strong argument for the belief that leaders are born with certain innate gifts, but must also be properly shaped and made into a true leader.

Peter had the God-given fabric of leadership woven into his personality from the beginning. He was made of the right raw material. Of course, it was the Lord who fashioned him this way in his mother's womb (cf. Psalm 139:13–16).

There are certain rather obvious features in Simon 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.

The first one is *inquisitiveness*. When you're looking for a leader, you want someone who asks lots of questions. People who are not inquisitive simply don't make good leaders. Curiosity is crucial to leadership. People who are content with what they don't know, happy to remain ignorant about what they don't understand, complacent about what they haven't analyzed, and comfortable living with problems they haven't solved—such people cannot lead. Leaders need to have an insatiable curiosity. They need to be people who are hungry to find answers. Knowledge is power. Whoever has the information has the lead. If you want to find a leader, look for someone who is asking the right questions and genuinely looking for answers.

This sort of inquisitiveness normally manifests itself in early childhood. Most of us have encountered children who ask question after question—wearing their parents and other adults with a nonstop barrage of petty puzzlers. (Some of us can even remember being like that as children!) That is part of the fabric of leadership. The best problem-solvers are people who are driven by an unquenchable enthusiasm for knowing and understanding things.



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In the Gospel accounts, Peter asks more questions than all the other apostles combined. It was usually Peter who asked the Lord to explain His difficult sayings (Matthew 15:15; Luke 12:41). It was Peter who asked how often he needed to forgive (Matthew 18:21). It was Peter who asked what reward the disciples would get for having left everything to follow Jesus (Matthew 19:27). It was Peter who asked about the withered fig tree (Mark 11:21). It was Peter who asked questions of the risen Christ (John 21:20–22). He always wanted to know more, to understand better. And that sort of inquisitiveness is a foundational element of a true leader.

Another necessary ingredient is initiative. If a man is wired for leadership, he will have drive, ambition, and energy. A true leader must be the kind of person who makes things happen. He is a starter. Notice that Peter not only asked questions; he was also usually the first one to answer any question posed by Christ. He often charged right in where angels fear to tread.

There was that famous occasion when Jesus asked, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (Matthew 16:13). Several opinions were circulating among the people about that. “So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets’ ” (v. 14). Jesus then asked the disciples in particular, “But who do you say that I am?” (v. 15, emphasis added). It was at that point that Peter boldly spoke out above the rest: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). The other disciples were still processing the question, like schoolboys afraid to speak up lest they give the wrong answer. Peter was bold and decisive. That’s a vital characteristic of all great leaders. Sometimes he had to take a step back, undo, retract, or be rebuked. But the fact that he was always willing to grab opportunity by the throat marked him as a natural leader.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, when Roman soldiers from Fort Antonia came to arrest Jesus, all three synoptic Gospel writers say there was a “great multitude” armed with “with swords and staves” (Matthew 26:47; cf. Mark 14:43; Luke 22:47). A typical Roman cohort consisted of six hundred soldiers, so in all likelihood there were hundreds of battle-ready Roman troops in and around the garden that night. Without hesitating, Peter pulled out his sword and took a swing at the head of Malchus, the servant of the high priest. (The high priest and his personal staff would have been in the front of the mob, because he was the dignitary ordering the arrest.) Peter was undoubtedly trying to cut the man’s head off. But Peter was a fisherman, not a swordsman. Malchus ducked, and his ear was severed. So Jesus “touched his ear and healed him” (Luke 22:51). Then He told Peter, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52). (Thus He affirmed the equity of capital punishment as a divine law.)

Think about that incident. There was an entire detachment of Roman soldiers there—perhaps numbering in the hundreds. What did Peter think he was going to do? Behead them all, one by one? Sometimes in Peter’s passion for taking the initiative, he overlooked the obvious big-picture realities.

But with all his brashness, Peter had the raw material from which a leader could be made. Better to work with a man like that than to try to motivate someone who is always passive and hesitant. As the familiar saying goes, it is much easier to tone down a fanatic than to resurrect a corpse. Some people have to be dragged tediously in any forward direction. Not Peter. He always wanted to move ahead. He wanted to know what he didn’t know. He wanted to understand what he didn’t understand. He was the first to ask questions and the first to try to answer questions.



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He was a man who always took the initiative, seized the moment, and charged ahead. That's the stuff of leadership.

Remember, these characteristics are only the raw material from which a leader is made. Peter needed to be trained and shaped and matured. But to do the task Christ had for him, he needed moxie, chutzpa—courage to stand up in Jerusalem on Pentecost and preach the gospel in the face of the same population who had lately executed their own Messiah. But Peter was just the sort of fellow who could be trained to take that kind of courageous initiative.

There's a third element of the raw material that makes a true leader: *involvement*. True leaders are always in the middle of the action. They do not sit in the background telling everyone else what to do while they live a life of comfort away from the fray. A true leader goes through life with a cloud of dust around him. That is precisely why people follow him. People cannot *follow* someone who remains distant. The true leader must show the way. He goes before his followers into the battle.

Jesus came to the disciples one night out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, walking on the water in the midst of a violent storm. Who out of all the disciples jumped out of the boat? Peter. *There's the Lord*, he must have thought. *I'm here; I've got to go where the action is*. The other disciples wondered if they were seeing a ghost (Matthew 14:26). But Peter said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." Jesus answered, "Come" (vv. 27–28)—and before anyone knew it, Peter was out of the boat, walking on the water. The rest of the disciples were still clinging to their seats, trying to make sure they didn't fall overboard in the storm. But Peter was out of the boat without giving it a second thought. That is involvement—*serious* involvement. Only after he left the boat and walked some distance did Peter think about the danger and start to sink.

People often look at that incident and criticize Peter's lack of faith. But let's give him credit for having faith to leave that boat in the first place. Before we disparage Peter for the weakness that almost brought him down, we ought to remember where he was when he began to sink.

Similarly, although Peter denied Christ, keep in mind one significant fact: He and one other disciple (probably his lifelong friend, John) were the only ones who followed Jesus to the high priest's house to see what would become of Jesus (John 18:15). And in the courtyard of the high priest's house, Peter was the only one close enough for Jesus to turn and look him in the eyes when the rooster crowed (Luke 22:61). Long after the other disciples had forsaken Christ and fled in fear for their lives, Peter was virtually alone in a position where such a temptation could snare him, because despite his fear and weakness, he couldn't abandon Christ completely. That's the sign of a true leader. When almost everyone else bailed out, he tried to stay as close to his Lord as he could get. He wasn't the kind of leader who is content to send messages to the troops from afar. He had a passion to be personally involved, so he is always found close to the heart of the action.

That was the raw fabric of which Peter was made: an insatiable inquisitiveness, a willingness to take the initiative, and a passion to be personally involved. Now it was up to the Lord to train and shape him, because frankly, that kind of raw material, if not submitted to the Lord's control, can be downright dangerous.

THE LIFE EXPERIENCES THAT SHAPE A TRUE LEADER



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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 experience were dramatic and often painful. His life was filled with tortuous zigs and zags. The Lord dragged 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? Did He take some glee in tormenting Peter? Not at all; the experiences—even the difficult ones—were all necessary to shape Peter into the man he needed to become.

Recently I read the results of a study involving all the young people in America who have been involved in the epidemic of school shooting rampages. It turns out that the common denominator among the shooters is that virtually all of them are young people who were prescribed Ritalin or other antidepressant drugs to control behavior problems. Instead of being disciplined for wrong attitudes and bad behavior, they were drugged into a stupor. Instead of training them to behave and teaching them self-control, child psychologists prescribed mind-numbing drugs that only temporarily curbed their rebellious behavior. The defiant, rebellious attitudes that were the root of the problem were never confronted or dealt with. Those kids had been artificially sheltered from the consequences of their rebellion in their younger childhood. They missed the life experiences that might have shaped their character differently.

The apostle Peter learned a lot through hard experience. He learned, for example, that crushing defeat and deep humiliation often follow hard on the heels of our greatest victories. Just after Christ commended him for his great confession in Matthew 16:16 ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"), Peter suffered the harshest rebuke ever recorded of a disciple in the New Testament. One moment Christ called Peter blessed, promising him the keys of the kingdom (vv. 17–19). In the next paragraph, Christ addressed Peter as Satan and said, "Get behind me!" (v. 23)—meaning, "Don't stand in My way!"

That incident occurred shortly after Peter's triumphant confession. Jesus announced to the disciples that He was going to Jerusalem, where He would be turned over to the chief priests and scribes and be killed. Upon hearing that, "Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!' " (Matthew 16:22). Peter's sentiment is perfectly understandable. But he was thinking only from a human standpoint. He did not know the plan of God. Without realizing it, he was trying to dissuade Christ from the very thing He came to earth to do. As usual, he was speaking when he ought to have been listening. Jesus' words to Peter were as stern as anything He ever spoke to any individual: "He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men' " (v. 23).

Peter had just learned that God would reveal truth to him and guide his speech as he submitted his mind to the truth. He wasn't dependent upon a human message. The message he was to proclaim was given to him by God (v. 17). He would also be given the keys to the kingdom—meaning that his life and message would be the unlocking of the kingdom of God for the salvation of many (v. 19).



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But now, through the painful experience of being rebuked by the Lord, Peter also learned that he was vulnerable to Satan. Satan could fill his mouth just as surely as the Lord could fill it. If Peter minded the things of men rather than the things of God, or if he did not do the will of God, he could be an instrument of the enemy.

Later, Peter fell victim to Satan again on the night of Jesus' arrest. This time he learned the hard way that he was humanly weak and could not trust his own resolve. All his boasting promises and earnest resolutions did not keep him from falling. After declaring in front of everyone that he would *never* deny Christ, he denied Him anyway, and he punctuated his denials with passionate curses. Satan was sifting him as wheat. Thus Peter learned how much chaff and how little substance there was in him and how watchful and careful he must be to rely only on the Lord's strength.

At the same time, he learned that in spite of his own sinful tendencies and spiritual weaknesses, the Lord wanted to use him and would sustain him and preserve him no matter what.

All those things Peter learned by experience. Sometimes the experiences were bitter, distressing, humiliating, and painful. Other times they were encouraging, uplifting, and perfectly glorious—such as when Peter saw Christ's divine brilliance on the Mount of Transfiguration. Either way, Peter made the most of his experiences, gleaning from them lessons that helped make him the great leader he became.

THE CHARACTER QUALITIES THAT DEFINE A TRUE LEADER

A third element in the making of a leader—besides the right raw material and the right life experiences—is the right character. Character, of course, is absolutely critical in leadership. America's current moral decline is directly linked to the fact that we have elected, appointed, and hired too many leaders who have no character. In recent years, some have tried to argue that character doesn't really matter in leadership; what a man does in his private life supposedly should not be a factor in whether he is deemed fit for a public leadership role. That perspective is diametrically opposed to what the Bible teaches. Character does matter in leadership. It matters a lot.

In fact, character is what makes leadership possible. People simply cannot respect or trust those who lack character. And if they do not respect a man, they will not follow him. Time and truth go hand in hand. Leaders without character eventually disappoint their followers and lose their confidence. The only reason such people are often popular is that they make other people who have no character feel better about themselves. But they aren't *real* leaders.

Lasting leadership is grounded in character. Character produces respect. Respect produces trust. And trust motivates followers.

Even in the purely human realm, most people do recognize that true leadership is properly associated with character qualities like integrity, trustworthiness, respectability, unselfishness, humility, self-discipline, self-control, and courage. Such virtues reflect the image of God in man. Although the divine image is severely tarnished in fallen humanity, it has not been entirely erased. That's why even pagans recognize those qualities as desirable virtues, important requirements for true leadership.



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Christ Himself is the epitome of what a true leader ought to be like. He 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.

Obviously, in *spiritual* leadership, the great goal and objective is to bring people to Christlikeness. That is why the leader himself must manifest Christlike character. That is why the standard for leadership in the church is set so high. The apostle Paul summarized the spirit of the true leader when he wrote, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Peter might just as well have written the same thing. His character was molded and shaped after the example he had witnessed in Christ. He had the raw material for becoming a leader, and that was important. His life experiences helped hone and sharpen his natural leadership abilities, and that was also vital. But the real key to everything—the essential foundation upon which true leadership always rises or falls—is character. It was the character qualities Peter developed through his intimate association with Christ that ultimately made him the great leader he became.

J. R. Miller wrote, “The only thing that walks back from the tomb with the mourners and refuses to be buried is the character of a man. What a man is survives him. It can never be buried.” That is a true sentiment, but there is something more important than what people think of us after we are dead. What is far more important is the impact we have while we are here.

What are some of the character qualities of a spiritual leader that were developed in the life of Peter? One is *submission*. At first glance that may seem an unusual quality to cultivate in a leader. After all, the leader is the person in charge, and he expects other people to submit to him, right? But a true leader doesn’t just demand submission; he is an example of submission by the way he submits to the Lord and to those in authority over him. Everything the true spiritual leader does ought to be marked by submission to every legitimate authority—especially submission to God and to His Word.

Leaders tend to be confident and aggressive. They naturally dominate. Peter had that tendency in him. He was quick to speak and quick to act. As we have seen, he was a man of initiative. That means 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.

He did it in some rather remarkable ways. One classic example of this is found in Matthew 17. This account comes at a time when Jesus was returning with the Twelve to Capernaum, their home base, after a period of itinerant ministry. A tax collector was in town making the rounds to collect the annual two-drachma (half-shekel) tax from each person twenty years old or older. This was not a tax paid to Rome, but a tax paid for the upkeep of the temple. It was prescribed in Exodus 30:11–16 (cf. 2 Chronicles 24:9). The tax was equal to two days’ wages, so it was no small amount.

Matthew writes, “Those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, ‘Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?’ ” (Matthew 17:24). Peter assured him that Jesus did pay His taxes.

But this particular tax apparently posed a bit of a problem in Peter’s mind. Was Jesus morally obliged, as the incarnate Son of God, to pay for the upkeep of the temple like any mere man? The sons of earthly kings don’t pay taxes in their fathers’ kingdoms; why should Jesus? Jesus knew what Peter was thinking, so “when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying,



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‘What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?’ ” (v. 25).

Peter answered, “From strangers.” Kings don’t tax their own children.

Jesus drew the logical conclusion for Peter: “Then the sons are free” (v. 26). In other words, Jesus had absolute heavenly authority, if He desired, to opt out of the temple tax.

But if He did that, it would send the wrong message as far as *earthly* authority is concerned. Better to submit, pay the tax, and avoid a situation most people would not understand. So although Jesus was not technically *obligated* to pay the temple tax, he said, “Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you” (v. 27).

The coin in the mouth of the fish was a stater—a single coin worth a shekel, or four drachma. It was exactly enough to pay the temple tax for two. In other words, Jesus arranged for Peter’s tax to be paid in full, too.

It’s intriguing that the miracle Jesus worked demonstrated His absolute *sovereignty*, and yet at the same time, He was being an example of human *submission*. Christ supernaturally directed a fish that had swallowed a coin to take the bait on Peter’s hook. If Jesus was Lord over nature to such a degree, He certainly had authority to opt out of the temple tax. And yet he taught Peter by example how to submit willingly.

Submission is an indispensable character quality for leaders to cultivate. If they would teach people to submit, they must be examples of submission themselves. And sometimes a leader must submit even when there might seem to be very good arguments *against* submitting.

Peter learned the lesson well. Years later, in 1 Peter 2:13–18, he would write,

Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

This was the same lesson Peter learned from Christ: You are free in one sense, but don’t use your freedom as a covering for evil. Rather, regard yourself as the Lord’s bondservant. You are a citizen of heaven and merely a sojourner on earth, but submit to every ordinance of man *for the Lord’s sake*. You are first and foremost a subject of Christ’s kingdom and a mere stranger and pilgrim on this earth. Nonetheless, to avoid offense, honor the earthly king. Honor all people. This is the will of God, and by submitting, you will put to silence the ignorance of ungodly men.

Remember, the man who wrote that epistle was the same man who when he was young and brash slashed off the ear of the high priest’s servant. He is the same man who once struggled over the idea of Jesus’ paying taxes. But he *learned* to submit—not an easy lesson for a natural leader. Peter especially was inclined to be dominant, forceful, aggressive, and resistant to the idea of submission. But Jesus taught him to submit willingly, even when he thought he had a good argument for refusing to submit.



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A second character quality Peter learned was *restraint*. Most people with natural leadership abilities do not naturally excel when it comes to exercising 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. Perhaps you have noticed recently that anger-management seminars have become the latest fad for CEOs and people in high positions of leadership in American business. It is clear that anger is a common and serious problem among people who rise to such a high level of leadership.

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. Such a man easily grows impatient with people who lack vision or underperform. He can be quickly irritated by those who throw up obstacles to success. Therefore he must learn restraint in order to be a good leader.

The Lord more or less put a bit in Peter's mouth and taught him restraint. That is one of the main reasons Peter bore the brunt of so many rebukes when he spoke too soon or acted too hastily. The Lord was *constantly* teaching him restraint.

That 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.

That rebuke must have been especially difficult for Peter, coming as it did in front of a horde of enemies. But he learned much from what he witnessed that night. Later in life, he would write, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth'; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:21–23).

How different that is from the young man who tried to grab a sword and whack his way through his opposers! Peter had learned the lesson of restraint.

He also had to learn *humility*. Leaders are often tempted by the sin of pride. In fact, the besetting sin of leadership may be the tendency to think more of oneself than one ought to think. 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. It is obvious by the way he jumps in with answers to all the questions. It is obvious in most of his actions, such as when he stepped out of the boat and began to walk on water. It became obvious in the worst and most disastrous way on that fateful occasion when Jesus foretold that His disciples would forsake Him.

Jesus said, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered' " (Matthew 26:31).

But Peter was cocksure: "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will *never* be made to stumble" (v. 33, emphasis added). Then he added, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33).

Of course, as usual, Peter was wrong and Jesus was right. Peter *did* deny Christ not once, but multiple times, just as Jesus had warned. Peter's shame and disgrace at having dishonored Christ



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so flagrantly were only magnified by the fact he had boasted so stubbornly about being impervious to such sins!

But the Lord used all of this to make Peter humble. And when Peter wrote his first epistle, he said, “be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:5–6). He specifically told church leaders, “[Don’t act like] lords over those entrusted to you, but [be] examples to the flock” (v. 3). Humility became one of the virtues that characterized Peter’s life, his message, and his leadership style.

Peter also learned love. All the disciples struggled with learning that true spiritual leadership means loving service to one another. The real leader is someone who serves, not someone who demands to be waited upon.

This is a hard lesson for many natural leaders to learn. They tend to see people as a means to their end. Leaders are usually task-oriented rather than people-oriented. And so they often use people, or plow over people, in order to achieve their goals. Peter and the rest of the disciples needed to learn that leadership is rooted and grounded in loving service to others. The true leader loves and serves those whom he leads.

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. But nowhere is it more plainly on display than in the Upper Room on the night of His betrayal.

Jesus and the disciples had come to celebrate the Passover in a rented room in Jerusalem. The Passover seder was an extended, ceremonious meal lasting as long as four or five hours. Celebrants in that culture usually reclined at a low table rather than sitting upright in chairs. That meant one person’s head would be next to another person’s feet. Of course, all the roads were either muddy or dusty, so feet were constantly dirty. Therefore the common custom was that when you went into a house for a meal, there was usually a servant whose job it was to wash guests’ feet. This was practically the lowliest and least desirable of all jobs. But for any host to neglect to arrange for his guests’ feet to be washed was a significant affront (cf. Luke 7:44).

Apparently on this busy Passover night, in that rented room, no provision had been made for any servant to wash the guests’ feet. The disciples were evidently prepared to overlook the breach of etiquette rather than volunteering to do such a menial task themselves. So they gathered around the table as if they were prepared to start the meal without any foot-washing. Therefore, Scripture says, Jesus Himself “rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded” (John 13:4–5).

Jesus Himself—the One they rightly called Lord—took on the role of the lowest slave and washed the dirty feet of His disciples. According to Luke, at about the same time this occurred, the disciples were in the midst of an argument about which one of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24). They were interested in being elevated, not humiliated. So Jesus did what none of them would do. He gave them a lesson about the humility of genuine love.

Most of them probably sat there in stunned silence. But when the Lord came to Simon Peter, **“Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, are You washing my feet?’ ” (John 13:6).** The sense of the statement is, *What do You think You’re doing?* Here is the brash and bold Simon, speaking without



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carefully thinking things through. He even went on to say, “You shall never wash my feet!” (v. 8).

Peter was the master of the absolute statement: “I will *never* deny You” (cf. Matthew 26:33). “You shall *never* wash my feet!” There are no shades of gray in Peter’s life; everything is in absolute black and white.

Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me” (John 13:8). Jesus, of course, was speaking of the necessity of *spiritual* cleansing. Obviously, it wasn’t the literal foot-washing that made the disciples fit for fellowship with Christ; Jesus was speaking about cleansing from sin. That was the spiritual reality this humble act of foot-washing was meant to symbolize. (Proof that He was speaking of *spiritual* cleansing is found in verse 10, when He said, “You are clean, but not all of you.” He had just washed their feet, so they were all clean in the external, physical sense. But the apostle John says in verse 11, “He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, ‘You are not all clean’ ”—signifying that Judas was not clean in the spiritual sense of which He spoke.)

Peter’s answer is typical of his usual unbridled wholeheartedness: “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” (v. 9). Again, there was never any middle ground with Peter. It was always all or nothing. So Jesus assured him that he was already “completely clean.” (The Lord was still speaking in spiritual terms about forgiveness and cleansing from sin.) Peter now needed nothing more than a foot-washing.

In other words, Peter, as a believer, was already fully justified. The forgiveness and cleansing he needed was not the kind of summary pardon one would seek from the Judge of the universe—as if Peter were seeking to have his eternal destiny settled. He had already received that kind of cleansing and forgiveness. But now Peter was coming to God as any child would approach a parent, seeking fatherly grace and forgiveness for his wrongdoings. That was the kind of cleansing Peter needed. It is the same kind of forgiveness Jesus taught all believers to pray for daily (Luke 11:4). Here, Jesus likens such daily forgiveness to a foot-washing.

Those truths were all wrapped up in the symbolism when Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. But the central lesson was about the way love ought to be shown. Jesus’ example was a consummate act of loving, lowly service.

Later that evening, after Judas had left, Jesus told the other eleven, “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” (vv. 34–35). How had He loved them? He washed their feet. While they were arguing about who was the greatest, He showed them what loving, humble service for one another looks like.

It’s hard for most leaders to stoop and wash the feet of those whom they perceive as subordinates. But that was the example of leadership Jesus gave, and He urged His disciples to follow it. In fact, He told them that showing love to one another in such a way was the mark of a true disciple.

Did Peter learn to love? He certainly did. Love became one of the hallmarks of his teaching. In 1 Peter 4:8 he wrote, “Above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’ ” The Greek word translated “fervent” in that verse is ektenes, literally meaning “stretched to the limit.” Peter was urging us to love to the maximum of our capacity. The love he spoke of is not about a feeling. It’s not about how we respond to people who are naturally lovable.



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It's about a love that covers and compensates for others' failures and weaknesses: "Love will cover a multitude of sins." This is the sort of love that washes a brother's dirty feet. Peter himself had learned that lesson from Christ's example.

Another important character quality Peter needed to learn was *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). Wheat was typically separated from the chaff by being shaken and tossed up into the air in a stiff wind. The chaff was blown away and the wheat would fall into a pile, thus purified.

We might have expected Jesus to reassure Peter by saying, "I'm not going to allow Satan to sift you." But He didn't. He essentially let Peter know that He had given Satan the permission he sought. He would allow the devil to put Peter to the test (as God did in the case of Job). He said, in essence, "I'm going to let him do it. I'm going to let Satan shake the very foundations of your life. Then I'm going to let him toss you to the wind—until there's nothing left but the reality of your faith." 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" (v. 32).

It was then that Peter arrogantly insisted that he would never stumble. Yet despite his protestations, before the night was over, he *did* deny Jesus, and his whole world was severely shaken. His ego was deflated. His self-confidence was annihilated. His pride suffered greatly. But his faith never failed.

What was this all about? Jesus was equipping Peter to strengthen the brethren. People with natural leadership abilities often tend to be short on compassion, lousy comforters, and impatient with others. They don't stop very long to care for the wounded as they pursue their goals. Peter needed to learn compassion through his own ordeal, so that when it was over, he could strengthen others in theirs.

For the rest of his life, Peter would need to show compassion to people who were struggling. After being sifted by Satan, Peter was well equipped to empathize with others' weaknesses. He could hardly help having great compassion for those who succumbed to temptation or fell into sin. 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.

In 1 Peter 5:8–10, he wrote, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you."

Peter understood human weakness, and he understood it well. 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. As usual, he was writing out of his own experience. These were not theoretical precepts he taught.

Finally, he had to learn *courage*. Not the impetuous, headlong, false kind of "courage" that caused him to swing his sword so wildly at Malchus, but a mature, settled, intrepid willingness to suffer for Christ's sake.



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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. Therefore Peter would face difficulty wherever he went. Christ told him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish” (John 21:18).

What did that mean? The apostle John gives a clear answer: “This He spoke, signifying by what death [Peter] would glorify God” (v. 19).

The price of preaching would be death for Peter. Persecution. Oppression. Trouble. Torture. Ultimately, martyrdom. Peter would need rock-solid courage to persevere.

You can practically see the birth of real courage in Peter’s heart at Pentecost, when he was filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Prior to that, he had shown flashes of a fickle kind of courage. That is why he impetuously drew his sword in front of a multitude of armed soldiers one minute but denied Jesus when challenged by a servant girl a few hours later. His courage, like everything in his life, was marred by instability.

After Pentecost, however, we see a different Peter. Acts 4 describes how Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling counsel. They were solemnly instructed “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (v. 18).

Peter and John boldly replied, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (vv. 19–20). Soon they were brought back before the Sanhedrin for continuing to preach. Again they told them the same thing: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit and driven by the knowledge that Christ had risen from the dead, had acquired an unshakable, rock-solid courage.

In Peter’s first epistle we get a hint of why he was filled with such courage. Writing to Christians dispersed all over the Roman Empire because of persecution, he tells them:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:3–7)

He was secure in Christ, and he knew it. He had seen the risen Christ, so he knew Christ had conquered death. He knew that whatever earthly trials came his way, they were merely temporary. The trials, though often painful and always distasteful, were nothing compared to the hope of eternal glory (cf. Romans 8:18). The genuineness of true faith, he knew, was infinitely more precious than any perishing earthly riches, because his faith would redound to the praise and glory of Christ at His appearing. That hope is what gave Peter such courage.

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 Rock. He learned submission,



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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.

He preached at Pentecost and three thousand people were saved (Acts 2:14–41). He and John healed a lame man (Acts 3:1–10). He was so powerful that people were healed in his shadow (Acts 5:15–16). He raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36–42). He introduced the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10). And he wrote two epistles, 1 and 2 Peter, in which he featured the very same lessons he had learned from the Lord about true character.

What a man Peter was! Was he perfect? No. In Galatians 2 the apostle Paul relates an incident in which Peter compromised. He acted like a hypocrite. We see a brief flash of the old Simon. Peter was eating with Gentiles, fellowshiping with them as true brethren in Christ—until some false teachers showed up. These heretics insisted that unless the Gentiles were circumcised and following Old Testament ceremonial law, they could not be saved and should not be treated as brethren. Peter, apparently intimidated by the false teachers, stopped eating with the Gentile brethren (Galatians 2:12). Verse 13 says that when Peter did it, everybody else did it, too, because Peter was their leader. So the apostle Paul writes, “I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed” (v. 11). Paul rebuked Peter in the presence of everyone (v. 14).

To Peter's credit, he responded to Paul's correction. And when the error of the Judaizers was finally confronted at a full council of church leaders and apostles in Jerusalem, it was Peter who spoke up first in defense of the gospel of divine grace. He introduced the argument that won the day (Acts 15:7–14). He was in effect defending the apostle Paul's ministry. The whole episode shows how Simon Peter remained teachable, humble, and sensitive to the Holy Spirit's conviction and correction.

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 thus he was nailed to a cross head-downward.

Peter's life could be summed up in the final words of his second epistle: “Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). That is exactly what Simon Peter did, and that is why he became Rock—the great leader of the early church.²

1 Peter

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² MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *Twelve ordinary men: how the Master shaped his disciples for greatness, and what He wants to do with you* (pp. 29–60). Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group.



Who Are The Apostles?
Week #10: Embracing Peter

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www.eerdmans.com³ **Read This Book**

PETER THE APOSTLE (Πέτρος, *Petros*). An apostle of Jesus Christ and one of the three named pillars of the early church in Jerusalem. **Peter was the first Christian missionary to the Gentiles, a Christian missionary to the Jews, and a Christian martyr in Rome. Also called Cephas.**

Introduction to Peter

Simon Peter is one of Jesus' first disciples and later becomes the spokesman of the Twelve. Although Jesus gives Simon the name "Peter" ("rock"; Πέτρος, *Petros*; in Matt 16:18; Mark 3:16; Κηφᾶς, *Kēphas*; in John 1:42), his ability to live up to it is often in doubt in the Gospels. Peter's rebuke of the Lord (Matt 16:22–23; Mark 8:32–33), his falling asleep in the garden (Matt 26:40; Mark 14:37), his attack on Malchus (Mark 14:47; John 18:10–11), and his denial of Jesus (Matt 26:69–75; Mark 14:66–72; Luke 22:55–61; John 18:15–27) all support this perception. However, Jesus' reinstatement of Peter in John 21:15–17 ("Do you love Me ... feed My sheep") communicates His confidence in and selection of him as the head of the early church. Luke demonstrates this in the book of Acts, which portrays Peter as a bold proclaimer of the gospel (Acts 2:14–41; 3:12–26; 4:8–21), a miracle worker (Acts 3:1–11; 9:32–35, 38–42), an authoritative figure in the early church (Acts 1:15–26; 5:3–10; 8:14–17; 15:7–11), the first missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1–45), and a missionary to the Jews outside of Jerusalem (Acts 12:17). Ultimately, Peter demonstrates his total devotion as a follower of Jesus when he dies a martyr's death in Rome (1 Clement 5:4).

Peter in the New Testament

The New Testament provides limited information on Peter's life and background before his call to discipleship. His Hebrew name is Simon or Simeon (see Acts 15:14). His father's name is John, and his brother's name is Andrew (the disciple of Jesus). Peter grew up in Bethsaida (Βηθσαϊδά, *Bēthsaida*), a fishing village on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and operated a fishing business in partnership with the Zebedee brothers, James and John (also disciples of Jesus; John 1:44; Mark

³ Green, J. B. (2007). [1 Peter](#) (pp. iii–iv). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.



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1:16; Luke 5:10). He apparently was married (Mark 1:30; 1 Cor 9:5) and later lived in Capernaum.

Peter in the Gospels

References to Peter in the Gospels are numerous and often attest to his prominence among the Twelve:

Peter is called to leave everything and follow Jesus	Matt 4:18–20; Luke 5:1–11
Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law	Matt 8:14–15; Mark 1:30–31; Luke 4:38–39
Peter is the first disciple named in the lists of the Twelve	Matt 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16
Peter is the spokesperson when Jesus is touched by the bleeding woman	Luke 8:45
Peter, along with James and John, at the raising of Jarius’ daughter	Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51
Peter walks on the water	Matt 14:28–31
Peter’s confession after many disciples have turned away	John 6:66–69
Peter asks Jesus to explain a parable	Matt 15:15
Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah	Matt 16:13–19; Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:18–21
Jesus rebukes Peter	Matt 16:21–23; Mark 8:31–33
Peter with Jesus at the transfiguration	Matt 17:1–9; Mark 9:1–9; Luke 9:27–36
Jesus involves Peter in the questioning of the temple tax	Matt 17:24–27
Peter asks Jesus about the extent of forgiveness	Matt 18:21–22
Peter as spokesman for himself and the disciples, claiming to have left everything to follow Jesus	Matt 19:27–30; Mark 10:28–31; Luke 18:28–30



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Peter remembers the withered fig tree	Mark 11:20–25
Peter and John are sent to prepare the Passover meal	Luke 22:7–13
Peter’s response as Jesus attempts to wash his feet	John 13:6–11
Jesus foretells Peter’s denial	Matt 26:31–35; Mark 14:27–31; Luke 22:31–34; John 13:36–38
Peter sleeps in the garden of Gethsemane	Matt 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42
Peter attacks the servant of the high priest at Jesus’ arrest	Mark 14:47; John 18:10–11
Peter denies Jesus	Matt 26:69–75; Mark 14:66–72; Luke 22:55–61; John 18:15–27
Peter is informed of Jesus’ arrival in Galilee	Mark 16:7
Peter runs to the tomb of Jesus to discover that it is empty	Luke 24:12
Cleopas and another disciple learn that Jesus has appeared to Peter	Luke 24:34
Peter catches fish at the encouragement of Jesus	John 21:3–14
Peter is reinstated by Jesus	John 21:15–19

Peter in Acts

Peter’s leadership role in the early church dominates the first half of the book of Acts. His portrayal in Acts 15 is pivotal for the remainder of the text; however, after chapter 15, Peter is not connected with the gospel’s advancement into the Gentile world.

In Acts 1, Peter demonstrates his leadership among the disciples as they pray together, seeking guidance from God. Peter leads the group (about 120 people) to select from among themselves an apostle to replace Judas. Agreeing with Peter, the group takes steps to fill the void, finally selecting Matthias as the new apostle to accompany the remaining eleven.



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In Acts 2, Peter, along with the other followers of Jesus, are filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Standing with the other 11 apostles, Peter preaches in response to the questions of the crowd, explaining to them the meaning of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Peter's leadership resulted in about 3,000 people being added to the early church.

Once again, in Acts 3, Peter is the chief character. Peter and John are headed to the temple to pray when they meet a man who is lame from birth. Peter tells the man to "get up and walk," and he is healed. Peter then uses the attention garnered from this miracle as an opportunity to evangelize the crowd.

Acts 4 continues the story with Peter and John being arrested. The following day they are taken to a gathering where all the rulers, elders, and scribes of Jerusalem are present, along with Caiaphas, the high priest. Peter boldly proclaims the story of Jesus and His salvation. The leaders threaten them and demand that they cease teaching about Jesus. Peter and John refuse but are ultimately released.

Acts 5 portrays Peter as discerning and powerful. Ananias presents an offering to the church in a misleading and deceitful manner. Peter calls out the lie, and Ananias subsequently dies at his feet. Three hours later, Ananias' wife, Sapphira, dies in a similar manner. Peter becomes so powerful that the sick and possessed are healed merely with the touch of his shadow (5:15). Later in the chapter, Peter rebukes the council of Pharisees (5:29), only to be beaten along with other believers who were present (5:40).

In Acts 8, Peter and John travel to Samaria to verify that the people there have received the Word of God. A man identified as Simon the Magician observes the giving of the Holy Spirit by Peter and wishes to obtain this gift through financial means. The account ends with Peter severely rebuking Simon for his inappropriate request.

In Acts 9, Peter visits the believers in Lydda and heals a man who was paralyzed for eight years. After hearing about a deceased believer in the nearby town of Joppa, Peter travels to her deathbed. He prays and commands the woman to "get up," and she returns to life. Because of Peter's mighty deeds, many people believe in Jesus.

Acts 10 tells the story of Peter's encounter with Cornelius. After Peter receives a vision from the Lord, men from Cornelius' household invite Peter to be their guest. Peter agrees, travels to Cornelius' residence, and proclaims the message of Jesus as relevant to all nations (ἔθνος, *ethnos*). As Peter is preaching, the Holy Spirit is given to those present in Cornelius' household, including Gentiles. This marks the third time that Peter has been involved in the giving of the Holy Spirit—in Jerusalem among the Jews, in Samaria among the Samaritans, and in Caesarea among the Gentiles. But when Peter returns to Jerusalem, he is challenged by some Jewish Christians regarding his visit to Gentiles. Acts 11 records his response to their misgivings. Once again, Acts shows how highly respected Peter is among his peers, as they marvel that God has seen fit to give the Holy Spirit to Gentiles.

Acts 12 records King Herod's (Agrippa I) opposition to the fledgling church and to Peter as its leader. Herod arrests Peter with the intention of executing him. However, Peter is miraculously saved by an angel who leads him out of prison unscathed. Following a brief meeting with some believers, Peter departs to another place (12:17). Although the narrative does not specify his destination, there has been much speculation; Rome, Antioch, Mesopotamia, Corinth, and Edessa are all possibilities.



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Peter makes one final appearance in Acts 15. Here, the Jerusalem council convenes to discuss how the Gentiles are to be included among the people of God. Peter's speech resolves the matter following much debate. He recounts how God used him to include the Gentiles without any additional "yoke." Barnabas and Paul affirm Peter's conclusion with their testimony. James, the brother of Jesus, confirms the work of God and among the Gentiles, with the added declaration that they need not be circumcised to join the people of God. Peter's influence, coupled with James' interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, signals a decisive shift in the early church with permanent ramifications.

Peter in the Letters—Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 1 Peter

The New Testament letters of Galatians, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Peter provide information about Peter's apostolic ministry.

Paul mentions Peter extensively in his letter to the Galatians. In chapter 1, Paul mentions Peter as the first apostle he encounters during his visit to Jerusalem (1:18). Although Paul seems to be distinguishing himself from those in Jerusalem, it is significant that meeting with Peter is his top priority. In chapter 2, Paul gives Peter the description of "pillar" along with James and John (2:9). He reports that all were in agreement that his mission should be to Gentiles, while their mission should be to the Jews (2:9–10). In chapter 2, Paul recounts a conflict with Peter regarding the latter's hypocrisy toward the Gentiles in Antioch. This gives rise to the popular belief that Paul and Peter were in strong conflict with one another, but other texts such as 2 Pet 3:15 affirms their mutual support. (For more on this, see Dunn, "The Incident," 3–57; Kilpatrick, "Peter, Jerusalem and Galatians," 319–26.)

First Corinthians also provides some biographical information concerning Peter. In 1 Corinthians, Paul opens the letter with his concern of division in the church. In 1:12, Paul names Cephas as someone the people have chosen to follow. Martin Hengel and others use this as a means to further develop a so-called conflict between Paul and Peter (Hengel, *Saint Peter*, 66–79), ignoring the fact that Apollos and Jesus himself are mentioned in the same list. What this list does seem to indicate, though, is that at some point in Peter's travels, he arrived at Corinth and preached the gospel to the people there. Later, Paul reveals that Peter and other disciples also traveled with their wives in their missionary endeavors (9:5). Finally, in what is sure to be a pre-formed tradition, Paul lists Peter as the first person to whom the Lord appeared following His resurrection (15:5).

Although 1 Peter is a letter of encouragement to suffering Christians in Asia Minor, it offers embedded information about its author. If 1 Peter is to be regarded to have been written by Peter, then one finds an aged apostle exercising influence over the church as a fellow elder (συμπρεσβύτερος, *sympresbyteros*; in 5:1). A potential location for Peter is hinted at by the cryptogram "Babylon" in 5:13—a likely reference to the city of Rome. Even still, it is possible the letter's vague mention of Peter provides no real information about the apostle at all, but simply is a letter of exhortation written in the name of Peter to the Christians in the region (See Perkins, *Peter*, 120–22).

Peter in Extrabiblical Writings

Beyond the New Testament, several extrabiblical writings mention Peter. For instance, *First Clement* recounts Peter's martyrdom in Rome (see Bauckham, "The Martyrdom of Peter," 549–



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95). *First Clement* was written to the Corinthians around the end of the first century AD by Clement, the bishop in Rome. Clement states that Peter endured hardship and died the glorious death of a martyr (5:4). The early church historian Eusebius confirms Clement's statement, adding the detail that Peter was crucified upside-down; Eusebius claims that the church father Origen was the first to record this detail, in a now lost fragment of Origen's *Commentary on Genesis* (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.1.2).

Peter also appears as a main character in several noncanonical texts, including the Acts of Peter and the Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles.

Selected Resources for Further Study

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JASON GISH⁴

PETER Derived from the Greek *petros*, meaning "rock." The name occurs 159 times in the NT. Simon was his personal name; Peter was given to him by Jesus (Matt. 16:18). Though Peter is dominant, there are three other names: the Hebrew Simeon (Acts 15:14), Simon, and Cephas (Aramaic for rock), used mostly by Paul (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Gal. 1:18; 2:9, 11, 14) and one other time (John 1:42).

Peter's Family The Gospels provide information about Peter and his family. He was called Barjona (Aramaic for "son of Jona," Matt. 16:17) or son of John (Gk. for Barjona, Luke 1:42). Peter and his brother Andrew came from Bethsaida (John 1:44) and were Galilean fishermen (Mark 1:16; Luke 5:2–3; John 21:3) in business with James and John (Luke 5:10). Peter was married (Mark 1:30) and lived in Capernaum (Mark 1:21–31). Peter and Andrew were associated with John the Baptist prior to becoming disciples of Jesus (John 1:40).

⁴ Gish, J. (2016). [Peter the Apostle](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Kloppenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



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Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu that honors the traditional site of Peter's weeping after his denial of Jesus.

Peter's Role Among the Disciples Peter was leader and spokesman for the 12 disciples (Mark 8:29; Matt. 17:24). Peter often posed questions to Jesus representing concerns of the others (Matt. 15:15; 18:21; Mark 11:21; Luke 12:41). Peter's name occurred first in listing the names of the Twelve (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14) and the inner circle (Peter, James, and John, in Mark 5:35–41; 9:2–8; 14:33, 43–50).

Peter sometimes had little faith. He was sometimes presumptuous (Matt. 16:22; John 13:8; 18:10) and timid (Matt. 14:30; 26:69–72). Sometimes he was self-seeking (Matt. 19:27), while at other times he was self-sacrificing (Mark 1:18). Sometimes he was spiritually perceptive (Matt. 16:16; John 6:68) and other times slow to understand spiritual matters (Matt. 15:15–16). Once he walked on water with Jesus, but his faith waned and he began to sink (Matt. 14:28–31). The greatest example of Peter's inconsistency was his confession, "You are the Messiah" (Matt. 16:16 HCSB), opposed to his denial, "I don't know this man" (Mark 14:71). After Pentecost (Acts 2:1) Peter was bold when persecuted. On two occasions Peter was arrested and warned to refrain from preaching about Jesus (Acts 4:1–22; 5:12–40). Herod imprisoned Peter with intent to execute him (Acts 12:3–5). Peter, however, was freed and delivered by an angel (Acts 12:6–11).

Peter's Role in the Early Church and His Legacy Though Peter led the disciples and took a prominent role in the early church (Acts 1–5), he did not emerge as the leader. Peter helped establish the Jerusalem church, but James the brother of Jesus assumed the leadership of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15). Though active in the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 11–12), Paul became "the apostle to the Gentiles" (Acts 14; 16–28). Peter served as a bridge to hold together the diverse people of the early church (Acts 15). Peter became the "apostle to the Jews," preaching throughout Palestine. Peter died as a martyr in Rome under Nero, probably in A.D. 64 or 65 (1 Clement 5:1–6:1). Tradition holds that Peter was crucified upside down because he felt unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus.

Conservative scholarship maintains that Peter wrote 1 and 2 Peter with scribal assistance. Eusebius held that John Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark to preserve the preaching of Peter. Apparently devotees of Peter produced pseudonymously the noncanonical books, the Acts of Peter and the Gospel of Peter, assigning Peter's name to them. See *Peter, First Letter from; Peter, Second Letter from*.

Steven L. Cox

PETER, FIRST LETTER FROM First Peter is addressed to churches in Asia Minor experiencing persecution. Peter reminded them of their heavenly hope and eternal inheritance so that they would be strengthened to persevere in the midst of suffering. He emphasized that believers are called to holiness and a life of love. Believers are called upon to glorify God in their daily lives and to imitate Christ who suffered on the cross for the sake of His people. Peter sketched what it means to live as a Christian, how believers relate to governing authorities, to cruel masters, and unbelieving husbands. He warned believers that suffering may be intense, but believers should rely upon God's grace, knowing there is a heavenly reward.



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Author The letter claims to be written by the Apostle Peter (1:1), and there is no good reason to doubt Petrine authorship. The early church fathers also supported Petrine authorship, and there is wide and early evidence in the fathers to support such a view. Nevertheless, scholars raised a number of objections to Petrine authorship. (1) A Galilean fisherman could not have written the cultivated Greek. (2) The OT quotations stem from the Septuagint, and Peter, since he did not know Greek, would not have used the LXX. (3) The theology of 1 Peter is remarkably Pauline in character, demonstrating that it is not authentically Petrine. (4) The letter says very little about the historical Jesus. (5) The persecution in the letter is empire-wide and would be dated in the time of Domitian (A.D. 81–96) or Trajan (A.D. 98–117).

None of these arguments are compelling, and Petrine authorship is solidly established. (1) Significant evidence exists that Greek was spoken in Palestine and especially in Galilee. As a fisherman in Galilee, Peter would have engaged in business with other Greek speakers. The notion that Peter was uneducated or illiterate is a myth. Acts 4:13 merely means that he was not trained rabbinically and should not be used to say he was unable to read. (2) Since Peter knew Greek, it is not surprising that he used the Septuagint. In particular Peter quoted from the Bible that his readers used, like any good pastor. (3) The old Tübingen notion that the theology of Peter and Paul was at loggerheads should be laid to rest. Paul himself argued that the apostles agreed upon the gospel (Gal. 2:1–10; 1 Cor. 15:11). (4) More allusions to the teaching of Jesus exist in the letter than some claim. In any case, there is no reason to insist that Peter was compelled to refer to the historical Jesus often in an occasional letter written for a specific purpose. (5) The notion that the persecution is empire-wide and state sponsored is hardly clear from 1 Peter, and most scholars now reject such a theory. Instead, 1 Peter indicates that sporadic persecution was breaking out against believers. Indeed the letter says nothing about believers being put to death, though the latter is a possibility. Hence, there is no compelling reason to doubt that the letter was written while Nero was emperor (A.D. 54–68) and Peter was still alive. It should be noted that not even Nero instituted an empire-wide persecution of Christians. His punishment of Christians in Rome after the fire that destroyed much of Rome was not the beginning of a policy that reached to the edges of the empire. (6) It is also possible that Peter used a secretary (amanuensis) to write the letter. Many have argued that the secretary was Silvanus (1 Pet. 5:12), though the language used in the verse denotes the carrier of the letter rather than the secretary. Still it is possible that Silvanus or some other person functioned as a secretary.

Date/Destination If we accept Petrine authorship, the letter was likely written in the early 60s, before the composition of 2 Peter. The first verse of the letter indicates that the letter was written to various churches in the northern part of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). The courier of the letter, presumably Silvanus, probably traveled in a circle in reading the letter to the various churches. The purpose of the letter was to fortify the churches and give them hope as they experienced persecution. We already noted that the persecution was sporadic and not state sponsored. Nor is there a clear indication that believers were being executed. Most likely, believers were being discriminated against in society and the work place and were subject to various forms of harassment.

Outline

- I. Opening (1:1–2)
- II. Called to Salvation as Exiles (1:3–2:10)



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- A. Praise for Salvation (1:3–12)
 - 1. A Promised Inheritance (1:3–5)
 - 2. Result: Joy in Suffering (1:6–9)
 - 3. The Privilege of Revelation (1:10–12)
- B. The Future Inheritance as an Incentive to Holiness (1:13–21)
 - 1. Setting One's Hope on the Inheritance (1:13–16)
 - 2. A Call to Fear (1:17–21)
- C. Living as the New People of God (1:22–2:10)
 - 1. A Call to Love (1:22–25)
 - 2. Longing for the Pure Milk (2:1–3)
 - 3. The Living Stone and Living Stones (2:4–10)
- III. Living as Aliens to Bring Glory to God in a Hostile World (2:11–4:11)
 - A. The Christian Life as a Battle and Witness (2:11–12)
 - B. Testifying to the Gospel in the Social Order (2:13–3:12)
 - 1. Submit to the Government (2:13–17)
 - 2. Slaves submit to masters (2:18–25)
 - a. To Receive a Reward (2:18–20)
 - b. To Imitate Christ (2:21–25)
 - 3. Wives Submit to Husbands (3:1–6)
 - 4. Husbands Live Knowledgeably with Your Wives (3:7)
 - 5. Conclusion: Live a Godly Life to Obtain an Inheritance (3:8–12)
 - C. Responding in a Godly Way to Suffering (3:13–4:11)
 - 1. The Blessing of Suffering for Christ (3:13–17)
 - 2. Christ's Suffering as the Pathway to Exaltation (3:18–22)
 - 3. Preparing to Suffer as Christ Did (4:1–6)
 - 4. Living in the Light of the End (4:7–11)
- IV. Persevering in Suffering (4:12–5:11)
 - A. Suffer Joyfully in accord with God's Will (4:12–19)
 - B. Exhortations to Elders and the Community (5:1–11)
 - 1. Exhortations for Elders and Younger Ones (5:1–5)
 - 2. Closing Exhortations and Assurance (5:6–11)
- V. Concluding Words (5:12–14)

Thomas R. Schreiner

PETER, SECOND LETTER FROM In his second epistle Peter wrote in response to false teachers who denied the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and advocated a libertine lifestyle. Peter maintained that God's grace is the foundation for a godly life and that living a life of godliness is necessary to obtain an eternal reward. Such a claim does not amount to works righteousness, for such works do not merit salvation but are a result of God's transforming grace. Peter also vigorously defended the truth of Christ's second coming, which was anticipated in the transfiguration and promised in God's word. Those who reject Christ's coming deny God's sovereignty. They reject God's intervention in the world and remove any basis for ethical living. Peter urged his readers to grow in grace and knowledge until the day of salvation arrives.



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Author Many scholars deny that 2 Peter was written by the Apostle Peter, claiming the letter is pseudonymous. This view is defended by the following arguments: (1) Peter used Jude as a source in his second chapter, and the letter of Jude is too late to have been used by the historic Peter who died in the 60s. Further, some insist that Peter would have never borrowed from a writer like Jude. (2) The Hellenistic vocabulary and theology in the letter show that Peter, a Galilean fisherman, could not be the author. The style and syntax are quite different from 1 Peter, demonstrating a different author from the first epistle. (3) The false teachers in the letter are second-century gnostics, and obviously Peter could not have written the letter in the second century. (4) Paul's letters are considered to be Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15–16), but it is impossible that Paul's letters could have been collected together and viewed as Scripture while Peter was alive. (5) The letter lacks clear attestation in the second century, and even in the fourth century its canonicity was questioned. Some evangelicals, such as Richard Bauckham, argue that 2 Peter fits a testament genre, but the letter was a “transparent fiction,” and hence none of the original readers thought the letter was genuinely written by Peter. It follows, then, that the original readers were not deceived by the inclusion of Peter's name.

Despite the objections of many, Petrine authorship is still the most convincing view. (1) Most important, the letter claims to be written by Peter (1:1). He claimed that his death is imminent (1:14). Even more striking, he claims to have heard and seen Jesus' transfiguration (1:16–18). The author is obviously open to a charge of deception and fraud if he was not Peter. (2) The use of Jude as a source is not certain but only a theory. Furthermore, even if Peter used Jude, there is no problem. Jude likely wrote before Peter died. Nothing in Jude demands a late date, and there is no reason why an apostle would not use another source. (3) The idea that the opponents were second-century gnostics is not verified by the data of the letter. No evidence exists of the cosmological dualism that was typical of Gnosticism. Nor is it clear that the opponents rejected the material world. (4) It is unnecessary to conclude from 2 Pet. 3:15–16 that all of Paul's letters were collected and stamped as canonical. Peter obviously knows some of the Pauline letters and considers them to be authoritative, but that is not the same thing as a collected canon of Pauline writings. Those who think that such a commendation of Paul by Peter is impossible are overly influenced by the old Tübingen hypothesis. (5) The vocabulary and style of 2 Peter are distinct from 1 Peter, and the language has a Hellenistic flavor. But this is not an insuperable problem. We need to observe firstly that the corpus of Petrine writings is incredibly small. Hence, judgments about “Petrine style” should be made with humility. Second, Peter may have adapted his style to speak to the situation of his readers, just as Paul did in Athens (Acts 17:16–34). Finally, Peter may have instructed a secretary (*amanuensis*) to compose the writing, and this may account for some of the stylistic differences. (6) The argument that Peter uses a different theology does not stand either. We need to recall that the letter is occasional and hence is not a summary of all of Peter's theology. Furthermore, the differences between 1 and 2 Peter theologically have often been overemphasized. (7) Second Peter is not as strongly attested by external evidence as many other letters. Still, some evidence for the letter's use exists even in the second century, and we ought to remember that the letter was ultimately judged to be authentic and canonical. (8) The “transparent fiction” hypothesis of Richard Bauckham is an interesting attempt to solve the problem of authorship. But Bauckham's view ultimately fails. No historical evidence exists that the letter was viewed as “transparent fiction.” If it was transparent,



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how could it be forgotten so quickly, so that any trace of such a fictional device has vanished from the historical record? Furthermore, there is no good evidence that pseudonymous letters were accepted as canonical. Indeed, they were rejected because they were fraudulent.

Date/Destination/Opponents The date of 2 Peter depends upon one's view of authorship. Probably Peter wrote the letter shortly before his death in the mid 60s. The letter was most likely written to the same readers who received 1 Peter (cp. 3:2), and hence it was probably sent to churches in Asia Minor. We have already noted that the opponents cannot legitimately be identified as gnostics. Jerome Neyrey suggests some affinities to the Epicureans, but no specific identification has been successful. We do know that the opponents were libertines and denied Christ's second coming. Both of these features are eminently possible in Peter's lifetime.

Outline

- I. Greeting (1:1–2)
- II. God's Grace the Foundation for a Life of Godliness (1:3–11)
 - A. Divine Provision (1:3–4)
 - B. Pursue a Godly Life Diligently (1:5–7)
 - C. Godly Virtues Necessary for Entrance into the Kingdom (1:8–11)
- III. Peter's Apostolic Reminder (1:12–21)
 - A. The Function of the Reminder: To Stir them for Action: (1:12–15)
 - B. The Truth of Jesus' Coming is Based on Eyewitness Testimony (1:16–18)
 - C. The Truth of Jesus' Coming is Based on the Prophetic Word (1:19–21)
- IV. The Arrival, Character, and Judgment of False Teachers (2:1–22)
 - A. The Impact of False Teachers (2:1–3)
 - B. The Certain Judgment of the Ungodly and the Preservation of the Godly (2:4–10a)
 - C. False Teachers Judged for Their Rebellion and Sensuality (2:10b–16)
 - D. The Adverse Impact of the False Teachers upon Others (2:17–22)
- V. Reminder: The Day of the Lord Will Come (3:1–18)
 - A. Scoffers Doubt the Coming Day (3:1–7)
 - B. The Lord's Timing is Different from Ours (3:8–10)
 - C. Living Righteously because of the Future Day (3:11–18)

Thomas R. Schreiner⁵

PETER, EPISTLES OF — two New Testament epistles bearing the name of "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:1) and "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:1), though otherwise having little in common.

First Peter, the longer of the two epistles, is written in fine Greek and refers frequently to the Old Testament. It is an epistle for the downhearted, written to give encouragement in times of trial and disappointment. First Peter anchors the Christian's hope not on logic or persuasion, but on the matchless sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who "suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (2:21).

⁵ Schreiner, T. R. (2003). [Peter, First Letter From](#). In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (pp. 1281–1285). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.



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In contrast to 1 Peter, 2 Peter is briefer and written in a forced style. It rails against false teachers, while reminding believers of their election by God and assuring them of Christ's return.

Structure of the Epistles. Following a greeting (1:1–2), 1 Peter begins on a positive note, praising God for the blessings of a “living hope” that He has reserved for believers (1:3–12). This doxology of praise sets a triumphant tone for the remainder of the letter, which can be divided into three parts: blessings, duties, and trials. The blessings extend from 1:3 to 2:10. Because of the “inheritance incorruptible and undefiled . . . reserved in heaven for you” (1:4), Peter calls on his readers to live a life holy and blameless, reminding them that they are a “holy nation, His [God’s] own special people” (2:9).

The second part of 1 Peter extends from 2:11 to 3:22. This section consists of guidance for social duties. The Christian’s lifestyle ought to be a testimony to nonbelievers (2:11–17); slaves ought to obey their masters—even unjust ones—bearing their humiliation as Christ bore His (2:18–25); the silent example of a Christian wife has great effect on a non-Christian husband (3:1–6); Christian husbands are to treat their wives as joint-heirs of the grace of life (3:7). In all things, let a blameless lifestyle bring shame on whoever would show opposition (3:8–22).

The third and final part of 1 Peter addresses the question of trials (4:1–5:11). In light of the nearness of the end, Christians must be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (4:1–11). They can rejoice in sharing Christ’s sufferings because of the glory that awaits them (4:12–19). In their pastoral duties, church elders are to follow the example of Jesus, who perfects, establishes, and strengthens the flock (5:1–11). The epistle closes with mention of Silvanus, the secretary who wrote the letter, and with greetings from “Babylon” (5:12–14).

Second Peter begins with a greeting (1:1–2), enjoining believers, because they have been chosen by God, to develop noble characters (1:3–14). Recognizing that his own death is near, the author sees in the transfiguration of Jesus a forecast of the brilliant day when Christ will come again (1:15–21). Chapter two is a condensation of material from the letter of Jude, condemning false teachers and prophets. The final chapter deals with the future coming of the Lord and the reasons for its delay (3:1–18).

Authorship and Date. First Peter identifies its author as “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1). His frequent references to Christ’s suffering (2:21–24; 3:18; 4:1; 5:1) show that the profile of the Suffering Servant was etched deeply upon his memory. He calls Mark his “son” (5:13), recalling his affection for the young man and family mentioned in Acts 12:12. These facts lead naturally to the assumption that the apostle Peter wrote this letter.

Authorship of the epistle by the apostle Peter has been challenged, however, on the following grounds: (1) no official persecutions of the church took place during Peter’s lifetime; (2) the epistle echoes some of Paul’s teachings; and (3) the literary quality of the Greek seems too refined for a Galilean fisherman.

Valid as these objections are, they do not seriously challenge Peter’s authorship of the epistle. The sufferings mentioned in the epistle need not refer to official persecutions, which did not begin until the time of the Roman emperor Domitian (A.D. 81–96), but to earlier local incidents. The last two questions are neatly resolved by recognizing the role that Silvanus (5:12) played in composing the epistle.

As a former associate of the apostle Paul, and as one who doubtless came to the Greek language as a native, Silvanus may have played an important role in bringing this epistle to



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completion. We might say of 1 Peter that the ideas came from Peter, but the design from Silvanus. The reference to “Babylon” (5:13), a common image for civil power opposed to God, indicates that the epistle was written from Rome.

The question of authorship of 2 Peter is more difficult. Although the epistle claims to come from the apostle Peter (1:1; 3:1–2), who witnessed the transfiguration of Christ (1:18) and at the time of writing was nearing his death (1:14), few scholars believe Peter wrote the letter. Reasons for this judgment stem from a number of factors.

The style of 2 Peter is inferior to that of 1 Peter. Nearly the whole of Jude 4–18 has been reproduced in the second chapter; if Jude were not written until late in the first century, then 2 Peter obviously could not have been written before it. Again, 2 Peter refers to Paul’s epistles as a part of “the Scriptures” (3:16). This suggests a date, perhaps early in the second century, when Paul’s epistles had reached a level of authority in the early church. Finally, the Epistle of 2 Peter seems to have been unknown to the early church, and it was one of the last books to be included in the New Testament. These factors suggest that 2 Peter was written by an anonymous author but attributed by someone to the apostle Peter in order to assure a hearing for a message in a time well after Peter’s death.

On the other hand, most of the above objections are removed if we assume an earlier date for Jude and an earlier acceptance of a few of Paul’s letters into a developing Christian canon. In short, 2 Peter was probably written by Peter just before his martyrdom during the reign of Nero (about A.D. 65).

Historical Setting. First Peter is addressed to Christians living in “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1:1)—places in the northern and western parts of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). The readers appear to have been Gentiles (1:14, 18; 2:10; 4:3), although they probably had not been evangelized by Peter himself (1:12). The letter was obviously written to believers undergoing trials and persecutions, to give them courage in the face of their adversities (5:10).

Since it makes no mention of its audience, 2 Peter was probably intended for a general readership. Its primary purpose was to combat false teachers. Widespread in the ancient world was the view that sparks of eternal light lay trapped within the prisons of human bodies. These sparks of light, which longed to return to their primal home, could be liberated only by *gnosis*, or knowledge. Second Peter uses “knowledge” (1:5–6; 3:18) to show that only in Jesus Christ is the knowledge of God and salvation fully revealed. These false teachers also must have been critical of the delay in Christ’s return. To this challenge the author devoted the entire third chapter.

Theological Contribution. First Peter was written by one who sensed the triumphant outcome of God’s purpose for the world (1:4). The triumph of the future depends in no way on what we have done but on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because God has raised Jesus from the dead, God is deserving of praise; for “His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope” (1:3).

The unshakableness of our hope in Jesus Christ, which awaits us in heaven, resounds like a clap of thunder throughout this epistle. Because Christ has been raised from the dead, His suffering and death have meaning. The believer can gain courage in present adversity by looking to the example of Christ in His suffering. We have a sure hope for the future because of Christ’s



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resurrection. This truly is a “living hope,” for it is one we can live by, even in the midst of “various trials” (1:6).

If 1 Peter is an epistle of hope, the accent falls not on wishful thinking, but on present help. No biblical writer shows the connection between faith and conduct in a clearer manner than does Peter. “Conduct,” in fact, is a key word in this epistle (1:15, 17–18; 2:12; 3:1–2, 16). For Peter, practice is the most important thing.

The conduct Peter describes is the result of a life reclaimed by the perfect power of Jesus Christ. Christ has redeemed believers (1:18–19); Christ upholds and guides them (1:8; 2:25); and Christ will reward them (5:4). Christ is both the model and goal of the redeemed life. Consequently, believers may move forward on the pilgrim way, confident that the end will rise up to meet them with joy and salvation (2:11; 4:13–14).

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10). There is no better commentary on this Beatitude than the Epistle of 1 Peter. Here, too, Jesus is our sole help and our sure Lord, “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross” (Heb. 12:2).

Second Peter shifts the emphasis from a hope by which one can live to a hope on which one can count. The epistle speaks to the assurance of salvation in chapter one by making the extraordinary claim that Christians are “partakers of the divine nature” (1:4).

The second chapter deals with false teachers. The unique contribution of 2 Peter, however, comes in chapter three.

In chapter three the “day of the Lord” (3:10) or the “day of God” (3:12) breaks through the gloom of the doubters who taunt the hopeful (3:4). Such persons may be assured that God does not delay in coming because he lacks power or concern. Rather, what the unfaithful interpret as delay, the faithful know to be patience; for God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (3:9).

PETER, GOSPEL OF (see APOCRYPHA).

PETER, SIMON — the most prominent of Jesus’ twelve apostles. The New Testament gives a more complete picture of Peter than of any other disciple, with the exception of Paul. Peter is often considered to be a big, blundering fisherman. But this is a shallow portrayal. The picture of his personality portrayed in the New Testament is rich and many-sided. A more fitting appraisal of Peter is that he was a pioneer among the twelve apostles and the early church, breaking ground that the church would later follow.

The First Apostle to Be Called. Peter’s given name was Simeon or Simon. His father’s name was Jonah (Matt. 16:17; John 1:42). Simon’s brother, Andrew, also joined Jesus as a disciple (Mark 1:16). The family probably lived at Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee (Mark 1:21, 29), although it is possible they lived in Bethsaida (John 1:44).

Peter was married, because the gospels mention that Jesus healed his mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14–15). The apostle Paul later mentioned that Peter took his wife on his missionary travels (1 Cor. 9:5). Peter and Andrew were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, and perhaps in partnership with James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Luke 5:10). In the midst of his labor as a fisherman, Peter received a call from Jesus that changed his life (Luke 5:8).



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The Gospel of John reports that Andrew and Peter were disciples of John the Baptist before they joined Jesus. John also reports that Peter was introduced to Jesus by his brother Andrew, who had already recognized Jesus to be the Messiah (John 1:35–42). Whether Andrew and Peter knew Jesus because they were disciples of John is uncertain. But it is clear that they followed Jesus because of His distinctive authority.

The First Among the Apostles. Jesus apparently gathered His followers in two stages: first as disciples (learners or apprentices), and later as apostles (commissioned representatives). Peter was the first disciple to be called (Mark 1:16–18) and the first to be named an apostle (Mark 3:14–16). His name heads every list of the Twelve in the New Testament. He was apparently the strongest individual in the band. He frequently served as a spokesman for the disciples, and he was their recognized leader (Mark 1:36; Luke 22:32). Typical of Peter’s dominant personality was his readiness to walk to Jesus on the water (Matt. 14:28), and to ask Jesus the awkward question of how often he should forgive a sinning fellow believer (Matt. 18:21).

An inner circle of three apostles existed among the Twelve. Peter was also the leader of this small group. The trio—Peter, James, and John—was present with Jesus on a number of occasions. They witnessed the raising of a young girl from the dead (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51); they were present at Jesus’ transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–2); and they were present during Jesus’ agony in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37; Mark 14:33). During Jesus’ final week in Jerusalem, two of the three, Peter and John, were sent to make preparations for their last meal together (Luke 22:8).

The First Apostle to Recognize Jesus as Messiah. The purpose of Jesus’ existence in the flesh was that people would come to a true picture of who God is and what He has done for our salvation. The first apostle to recognize that was Peter. He confessed Jesus as Lord in the region of Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13–17).

Jesus began the process that would lead to Peter’s awareness by asking a nonthreatening question, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (Matt. 16:13). After the disciples voiced various rumors, Jesus put a more personal question to them, “But who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15). Peter confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God. According to Matthew, it was because of this confession that Jesus renamed Simon Cephas (in Aramaic) or Peter (in Greek), both meaning “rock.”

Why Jesus called Simon a “rock” is not altogether clear. Peter’s character was not always rock-like, as his denial of Jesus indicates. His new name probably referred to something that, by God’s grace, he would become—Peter, a rock.

The First Apostle to Witness the Resurrection. How ironic that the one who denied Jesus most vehemently in His hour of suffering should be the first person to witness His resurrection from the dead. Yet according to Luke (Luke 24:34) and Paul (1 Cor. 15:5), Peter was the first apostle to see the risen Lord. We can only marvel at the grace of God in granting such a blessing to one who did not seem to deserve it. Peter’s witnessing of the resurrection was a sign of his personal restoration to fellowship with Christ. It also confirmed His appointment by God to serve as a leader in the emerging church.

The First Apostle to Proclaim Salvation to the Gentiles. The earliest information about the early church comes from the Book of Acts. This shows clearly that Peter continued to exercise a key leadership role in the church for a number of years. Indeed, the first 11 chapters of Acts are built around the activity of the apostle Peter.



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When the Holy Spirit visited the church in Samaria, the apostles sent Peter and John to verify its authenticity (Acts 8:14–25). But this event was only a prelude to the one event that concluded Peter’s story in the New Testament: the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10–11). The chain of events that happened before the bestowal of the Holy Spirit on Gentile believers—beginning with Peter’s staying in the house of a man of “unclean” profession (Acts 9:43), continuing with his vision of “unclean” foods (Acts 10:9–16), and climaxing in his realization that no human being, Gentile included, ought to be considered “unclean” (Acts 10:34–48)—is a masterpiece of storytelling. It demonstrates the triumph of God’s grace to bring about change in stubborn hearts and the hardened social customs of Jewish believers.

Following the death of James, the brother of John, and Peter’s miraculous release from prison (Acts 12), Peter drops out of the narrative of Acts. Luke reports that he “went to another place” (Acts 12:17). We know, however, that Peter did not drop out of active service in the early church.

Peter probably broadened his ministry, once the mantle of leadership of the Jerusalem church fell from his shoulders to those of James. Peter played a key role at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15; Galatians 2), which decided in favor of granting church membership to Gentiles without first requiring them to become Jews. Paul mentioned a visit of Peter to Antioch of Syria (Gal. 2:11), and he may refer to a mission of Peter to Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12). Peter dropped into the background in the Book of Acts not because his ministry ended. Luke simply began to trace the course of the gospel’s spread to Gentile Rome through the ministry of Paul.

Photo by Willem A. VanGemeren

Jaffa, the biblical Joppa, where Peter received the heavenly vision about God’s acceptance of the Gentiles (Acts 10:1–23).

Peter in Rome: The First to Inspire the Writing of a Gospel. According to early Christian tradition, Peter went to Rome, where he died. Only once in the New Testament do we hear of Peter’s being in Rome. Even in this case, Rome is referred to as “Babylon” (1 Pet. 5:13). Little is known of Peter’s activities in Rome, although Papias, writing about A.D. 125, stated that Peter’s preaching inspired the writing of the first gospel, drafted by Mark, who was Peter’s interpreter in Rome. Peter was also the author of the two New Testament epistles that bear his name.

This early and generally reliable tradition supports the pioneer role played by Peter throughout his life and ministry. A number of other works—the Preaching of Peter, the Gospel of Peter, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Acts of Peter, and the Epistle of Peter to James—are apocryphal in nature. They cannot be accepted as trustworthy sources of information for the life and thought of the apostle.

Peter the First Pope? Whether Peter was the first pope of Rome is a question that can only be answered by a study of church history. Jesus’ statement to Peter in Matthew 16:18, “You



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are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church,” does not mention papal succession. But it does emphasize Peter’s prominent role in the founding of the church.⁶

LETTER OF PETER TO JAMES (*Epistula Petri*). A pseudonymous, noncanonical letter purportedly written by the apostle Peter to James, brother of Jesus, in which Peter asks James not to give away a written copy of his teachings to anyone who may misinterpret them. The letter includes an appendix called the *Contestatio* that records James’ favorable response to Peter’s request. There is no evidence that the *Letter of Peter to James* was widely authoritative in the early church period, and it survives only as a preface to the fourth-century *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*.

Overview

The *Letter of Peter to James*, like the *Homilies* to which it forms a preface, is preserved in Greek, its original language. It can be divided into two sections: the *Epistula Petri* (EpPet) and the *Contestatio* (C).

The Epistula Petri (EpPet)

In this section, which is the letter proper, a pseudonymous Peter:

- asks James not to share the enclosed homilies with anyone who is not Jewish or has not been properly vetted; he is worried that his teaching may be misinterpreted.
- mentions that an enemy has distorted his words among the Gentiles. This nemesis has presented Peter as a hypocrite who privately supports abandoning the Law while publicly upholding it.
- requests that his homilies be given only to individuals who have proven their worth in a probationary period.

The Contestatio (C)

In this section, which functions like an appendix following the letter, the character of James is depicted as:

- honoring Peter’s request and convenes a meeting of the seventy elders of the Jerusalem Church (C1).
- decreeing during the meeting that an appropriate recipient of Peter’s homilies should aspire to be a teacher, and be both circumcised and a believing Christian (C1).
- setting the probationary period to six years (C2) and establishing an oath to be sworn by any suitable candidate (C2–4).

Authorship and Audience

⁶ Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers (Eds.). (1995). In [Nelson’s new illustrated Bible dictionary](#). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.



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It is difficult to determine the precise viewpoint of the *Letter of Peter to James*. However, several emphases in the letter suggest that the author was influenced by both Judaism and Christianity. These emphases include:

- emulating Moses (*Letter of Peter to James* 1.2, 3.1–2; C 1.2);
- keeping the Law (*Letter of Peter to James* 2.5, 3.2; C 1.1–2);
- opposing an enemy who supports the dissolution of the Torah (*Letter of Peter to James* 2.3–3.1).

Peter's enemy in the *Letter of Peter to James*, discussed in the section on the Gentile mission, is portrayed as someone who preached to the Gentiles (*Letter of Peter to James* 2.3), preferred a Torah-free Gospel (*Letter of Peter to James* 2.3), accused Peter of hypocrisy (*Letter of Peter to James* 2.4), and misquoted Peter (*Letter of Peter to James* 2.4). This could be the author's characterizations of Paul, especially in light of Galatians. The portrayal of Peter as someone who fears that his words would be twisted after his death (*Letter of Peter to James* 6–7) may be a response to Peter being portrayed as a supporter of the Torah-free Pauline mission to the Gentiles in Acts (Acts 10; 15:7–11).

Date

Scholars generally date the *Letter of Peter to James* to the third century. Although dating anything within the *Pseudo-Clementine* tradition is quite difficult, there are some internal clues that allow for a rough estimate. The author quotes the Gospel of Matthew (*Letter of Peter to James* 2.5) and appears to have knowledge of both Galatians (*Letter of Peter to James* 2.3–4) and Acts (*Letter of Peter to James* 2.6–7); in addition, he seems to respect the position of the bishop (*Letter of Peter to James* 1.1). Because these traditions did not become firmly established and prominent in early Christianity until the mid-second century, scholars estimate AD 150 as the earliest possible date for the composition of the *Letter of Peter to James*. Regarding the other end of the range, the presence of Arian Christology within the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* suggests that the *Letter of Peter to James* should be dated no later than the beginning of the fourth century AD (Kelley, *Knowledge*, 14; Klauck, *Apocryphal*, 200).

Related Articles

For further information on Pseudo-Clementine literature, see this article: Pseudo-Clementines. For a discussion of Arianism and why it was opposed by church fathers such as Athanasius, see the "Arian Controversy" section of this article: Eusebius of Caesarea. For information on the process of canonization, see this article: Canon, New Testament.

Selected Resources for Further Study

- Ehrman, Bart D. *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- . *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Irscher, J. "The Pseudo-Clementines." Pages 532–570 in vol. 2 of *The New Testament Apocrypha*. Edited by W Schneemelcher. London: Lutterworth, 1964.



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- Kelley, Nicole. *Knowledge and Religious Authority in the Pseudo-Clementines*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006.
- Klauck, Hans-Josef. *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction*. Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2008.
- Stanton, Graham. "Jewish Christian Elements in the Pseudo-Clementine Writings." Pages 305–324 in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*. Edited by Oskar Skarsuane and Reidar Hvalvik. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007

JOSEPH ORYSHAK

LETTER OF PETER TO PHILIP A noncanonical, likely gnostic work found among the Coptic writings near Nag Hammadi (and Codex Tchacos). After offering a short pseudonymous letter from Peter to Philip, the work claims to recall apostolic gatherings, their revelatory dialogue with the risen Christ, and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles. This work was never widely authoritative in the early church period.

Content

The *Letter of Peter to Philip* (*Ep. Pet. Phil.*) claims to describe Jesus' appearances to his apostles during which he allegedly revealed gnostic theology, cosmology, and soteriology. The text begins with a pseudonymous letter in which Peter asks Philip to rejoin his company (*Ep. Pet. Phil.*, 132.10–133.8), perhaps suggesting Philip had set out to proclaim the gospel before receiving the Holy Spirit with the other apostles (Van den Broek, *Gnostic Religion*, 56; Luttikhuisen, "Letter," 97; Lapham, "Epistle," 173). The rest of the text is narrative, depicting the apostles having four supposed divine encounters.

First Encounter

The first encounter takes place when Peter gathers the apostles, including Philip, and they travel to the Mount of Olives, where they pray to the Father and the Son (*Ep. Pet. Phil.*, 133.21–134.9). The text claims that Christ appears, asking why they search for him as he is already with them. A dialogue ensues, in which Jesus answers theological and eschatological questions in what seem like gnostic terms, such as:

- the deficiency of the aeons (αἰών, *aiōn*);
- Christ as the "Fullness" (πλήρωμα, *plērōma*);
- detainment in this world, to which Jesus' response is difficult to ascertain due to lacunae (missing text);
- battles between evil powers and the apostles' inner selves; the text claims the powers can be defeated by girding the inner self with the Father's power.

The gnostic terminology in this dialogue leads Van den Broek to suggest that the author's "brief and unparticularized allusions indicate that he assumes his readers to be familiar with the [gnostic] myth" (Van den Broek, *Gnostic Religion*, 57).

Second Encounter



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After their first encounter with the character of Christ, the disciples return to Jerusalem. On their journey, they discuss suffering (*Ep. Pet. Phil.*, 138.10), and Peter says it is necessary for them to suffer because of their “smallness” (*Ep. Pet. Phil.*, 138.18–20). At this point a divine voice—most likely belonging to Christ—speaks about the necessity of suffering, which indicates that the suffering discussed may refer to persecution.

Third Encounter

The text claims to record a third divine epiphany: the Holy Spirit descending onto Peter in Jerusalem. He subsequently delivers a sermon (*Ep. Pet. Phil.*, 139.9–140.1) that includes:

- a recitation of a “traditional” credo about the Passion;
- the interpretation of that credo—including Jesus being a “stranger” to suffering (*Ep. Pet. Phil.*, 139.21–22); and
- an exhortation.

The text then claims that the Holy Spirit descends on the other apostles, and they heal and preach (*Ep. Pet. Phil.*, 140.8–12).

Fourth Encounter

The text claims that a final encounter occurs when Jesus appears to an assembly of the apostles and instructs them to proceed without fear. The apostles subsequently depart to preach the “gospel.” Kaler notes that the “gospel” is not the same as the revelation by Christ or Peter in the story (Kaler, “Letter,” 286).

Manuscripts

The two extant editions of the letter—both written in Coptic—may have originated from different translations of a Greek vorlage. The text is the second and final tractate of the eighth book of the Nag Hammadi codices, found in Egypt in 1945, alongside the possibly Sethian text Zostrianos. However, these two texts have little in common. The other version is in the Codex Tchacos, alongside the *First Apocalypse of James*, the *Gospel of Judas*, and a fragment of the *Book of Allogenes* (different from the *Allogenes* of the Nag Hammadi codices).

Date and Place

The letter was likely originally composed between the second and third century AD. Van den Broek suggests it was composed in AD 200 due to its incorporation of New Testament elements and similarities to other noncanonical literature on the apostles (Van den Broek, *Gnostic Religion*, 57). Meyer suggests it was written in the late second or early third century, possibly in Syria or Alexandria (Meyer, *Letter*, 433).

Relationship to the Biblical Text

The author of the *Letter of Peter to Philip* uses Christian sources and traditions. The text parallels Acts in scenes, themes, terms, and genre (see Meyer, *Letter*, 432). Peter’s sermon in the letter is (in some ways) reminiscent of his sermon in Acts (Acts 2:14–42; Meyer, *Letter*, 432). Van den Broek argues that the narrative and dialogue of the letter is largely based on Acts 1–2 (Van den Broek, *Gnostic Religion*, 56). Kaler situates the tractate within the specific



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historical context of Acts 7–8 and argues that it is indebted to a Pauline view of revelation—specifically Paul’s revelation in Acts 9 (Kaler, “Letter,” 269–78).

Despite such parallels, the letter differs from Acts in significant ways. One significant difference is its portrayal of the Pentecost event. The Pentecost event in Acts occurs among a crowd of unknown Jews in an unspecified location. In the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, it occurs in Jerusalem (potentially in the temple, but it is unclear) and only includes the apostles.

The *Letter of Peter to Philip* also contains allusions to the canonical Gospels. Luttikhuisen suggests it references the appearance of the risen Jesus and his great commission in Matthew (Luttikhuisen, “Letter,” 96). Meyer suggests the text contains allusions to the logos hymn in John, including Christ’s descent in a body and people’s failure to recognize him: “But they did not recognize me; they were thinking of me that I was a mortal man” (*Ep. Pet. Phil.*, 136.20–22; see Meyer, *Letter*, 131–33, 177–78). Meyer also suggests that the apostles’ visions of the risen Christ resemble the visions recorded in John (John 20:19–23; Meyer, *Letter*, 131–33, 432). Luttikhuisen writes that the author of the *Letter of Peter to Philip* “was thoroughly acquainted with these relevant passages of the New Testament Gospels and Acts and made free use of them” (Luttikhuisen, “Letter,” 96).

Gnostic Elements

Despite the similarities between the *Letter of Peter to Philip* and the New Testament, the *Letter* seems to belong within the gnostic tradition. The text includes an abbreviated version of the Sophia myth (*Ep. Pet. Phil.*, 135.8–136.15), which resembles the likely Sethian gnostic Apocryphon of John (*Ep. Pet. Phil.*, 137.13–138.3). Luttikhuisen suggests the author may have used a gnostic source for the sections that lack references to the New Testament (Luttikhuisen, “Letter,” 99). Furthermore, Peter’s sermon stresses Jesus’ suffering from the time of the incarnation but states that he suffered as one that is a “stranger to suffering” (*Ep. Pet. Phil.*, 139.21–22), signifying gnostic teaching (Meyer, *Letter*, 433).

Related Articles

For further information on Gnosticism and why it was deemed heretical by the early church fathers, see this article: [Gnosticism](#). For further details on the Nag Hammadi Codices, see this article: [Nag Hammadi Codices](#). For information on the process of canonization, see this article: [Canon, New Testament](#).

Selected Resources for Further Study

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Who Are The Apostles?
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SARAH PARKHOUSE⁷

CHAPTER 8



CHURCH BUILDERS

- **WAS PETER THE LEADER OF THE DISCIPLES?**
- **PETER AND THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM (Matthew 16)**
- **THE GOOD NEWS OF PETER'S SECOND CHANCE (John 21)**
- **PETER, AN EXAMPLE FOR MEN TODAY**
- **CONVERSION TRANSFORMS (Acts 9:3–30)**
- **KEYS TO NURTURING YOUNG CHRISTIANS (1 Thessalonians 2)**

Aside from the Son of God, two New Testament figures tower above all others: Peter, the "prince of the apostles," and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

PETER

⁷ Oryshak, J. (2016). [Letter of Peter to James](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



Who Are The Apostles? Week #10: Embracing Peter

Scripture references:
the Gospels; 1, 2 Peter;
Acts 1–5; 10–12;
Galatians 2:11–21

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Date:About 5 B.C.–A.D.65

Name:Peter [PEE-tuhr; “rock”]

*Greatest Accomplishment:Peter was the acknowledged leader of Jesus’
twelve disciples and preached the first gospel
sermons to Jews and Gentiles.*

PETER’S ROLE IN SCRIPTURE

Peter was a central figure in the Gospel narrative and the most quoted figure of the disciples. He was clearly the spokesman for the Twelve, the first to see spiritual truths and express them, and at the same time the first to blurt out his unformed thoughts. Peter played a central role in the three great transitions from Old to New Testament realities. Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ, recorded in Matthew 16, marked the shift in Jesus’ teaching from an emphasis on the kingdom to an emphasis on the cross. Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2; 3) defined the gospel message and led to the forming of the first local church. Peter’s visit to the home of the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10; 11) initiated the first Gentiles into what had been a purely Jewish church. Peter’s prominence in these three critical transition stages identifies him as one of the most significant men of the New Testament.

PETER’S LIFE AND TIMES

We can divide Peter’s life into four periods. Peter began life as a fisherman, became a disciple, then a preacher, and finally a missionary.

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Fishing Boat
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Who Are The Apostles? Week #10: Embracing Peter

Peter the fisherman. Peter began his life as a fisherman in Bethsaida (John 1:44). Nathaniel and Philip, two other disciples of Jesus, were also from this little fishing village that lay on the shores of upper Galilee. Peter's fishing business prospered. By the time we meet him in the Gospels, he had moved to Capernaum, the leading city of Galilee, and had gone into partnership with James and John, two other members of the Twelve.

Remains of what is believed to be Peter's house in Capernaum have been uncovered by archaeologists and, in harmony with the Gospel account, they suggest that his residence was relatively large. Peter was not simply a fisherman; he was involved in a successful fishing enterprise. Some commentators have suggested that Peter's business caught, salted, and transported fish to Jerusalem, where the disciple John oversaw their sale and distribution. While we cannot tell just how dominant Peter's fishing cooperative was, we do know that it was a successful enterprise. And we know that Peter, who was older than the others, was the acknowledged leader of a team of men who were already friends and co-workers when Jesus called them to follow Him.

The historian Josephus stated that some 330 fishing boats operated on the Sea of Galilee in the first century. One such boat, cradled in mud for some 2,000 years, was recovered in the 1980s along Galilee's shore. The boat, sketched here, was 27 feet long, and is undoubtedly the kind of boat Peter and his fishermen friends used.

Peter the disciple. It is striking that the team of fishermen Peter led responded to Jesus' call to follow Him together. They left their fishing business, and for the next three to three and a half years they accompanied Jesus everywhere.

In New Testament times, the role of the "disciple" was well defined. A person trained for spiritual leadership not by enrolling in a seminary but by becoming the disciple of a recognized rabbi. The disciple literally lived with his master, learned by listening and discussing matters with him, and also learned by observing his life. As Luke 6:40 indicates, the goal of discipleship was to produce a person who, when fully trained, "will be like his teacher."

The time Peter and the other disciples spent with Jesus was designed to prepare them for a life of ministry which, at the time, they could not envision. The time spent with Jesus was to prepare them not only to communicate what Jesus taught but to be Christlike.

Peter the preacher (Acts 2:22–39; 3:12–26). After Jesus' resurrection, Peter was the first to preach a gospel sermon. Two of Peter's sermons are recorded in Acts, and from them we can reconstruct the basic elements in the early preaching of Christ's disciples:

- Jesus, the historic person (2:22)
- Was crucified and raised from the dead (2:23, 24; 3:13–15)
- in accordance with Scripture (2:25–35; 3:18)
- He is God's Messiah (2:36; 3:20)
- All who believe on Him will have remission of sins and receive the Holy Spirit. (2:37, 38; 3:19, 21–26)

Peter also was the first to present the gospel to Gentiles (Acts 10; 11). The later New Testament letters, written to predominantly Gentile believers, make it clear that the core gospel Peter preached remained central to Christian preaching throughout the New Testament era.



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Peter the missionary. While the Book of Acts follows Peter’s ministry for only a few chapters, firmly established tradition tells us that Peter spent the rest of his life—some three decades after the resurrection—traveling and sharing Christ. Apparently, Peter focused on the Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire (Gal. 2:8), while Paul focused on reaching Gentiles. Early tradition states that John Mark, who traveled with Peter, wrote the Gospel of Mark and that Mark’s Gospel reflected the stories Peter told about the Savior.

Another generally accepted tradition tells us that Peter died in Rome in the mid-60s, crucified upside down by the Roman government within a year or two of the execution of the apostle Paul.

EXPLORING PETER’S RELATIONSHIPS

Peter’s relationship with the other disciples. Several facts indicate that the Twelve looked to Peter as their leader, although all looked to Jesus as Lord. Wherever the Gospels list the Twelve disciples, Peter’s name is listed first (Mark 14:13). Peter’s name occurs over 150 times in the Gospels and Acts—far more than any other disciple’s name.

The Gospel accounts also make it clear that three of the Twelve were closer to Jesus than the others, and at times they accompanied Him while the others waited behind. Not only was Peter one of the three, but again when the three are named Peter’s name is given first (Mark 5:37).

Peter served as the disciple’s spokesman. When a disciple’s dialog with Jesus is recorded, it is almost always Peter who speaks up. Peter’s influence over the others is reflected in John 21, which recounts that while the disciples waited in Galilee for Christ to visit them after His resurrection, Peter said, “I am going fishing.” And the others said, “We are going with you also” (John 21:3).

Peter was clearly the leader, not only by virtue of his outspokenness, but also because he could galvanize others to action by his example.

Peter’s relationship with Jesus. Peter shared with the other eleven disciples the privilege of traveling with Jesus and learning from Him. Yet, the Gospels make it abundantly clear that Peter was something more than another member of a group that had gathered around the Lord. A number of incidents recorded in the Gospels relate one-on-one interactions between Peter and our Lord. Several of them are beneficial in helping us understand Peter as a person and as a disciple.

Peter’s first contact with Jesus (John 1:41, 42). When John the Baptist began his exciting ministry in the Jordan Valley wilderness, many people came to hear his preaching. Among them was the team of fishermen headed by Peter. It happened that the fishermen were there the day Jesus was baptized, and two of them, Andrew and probably Philip, overheard John speak of Jesus as the “Lamb of God.” Intrigued, the two followed Jesus and spent the day with Him. That evening, or perhaps the next morning, they told their companions that they had found the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. This exciting message delivered by his brother Andrew introduced Peter to Jesus.

Jesus was from Nazareth, a hamlet not far from Capernaum. So the fishermen traveled back to Galilee with Jesus. On the way they stopped at a wedding in Cana, and there the future disciples witnessed the first of Jesus’ miracles (John 2). They then went on together to Capernaum, where Jesus visited with the fishermen for some time, apparently staying as a guest



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in Peter's house (Mark 1:29). While the first story about Jesus and the fishermen pictures their call to discipleship, Peter and the others had come to know Jesus earlier. By all accounts, months after meeting Jesus, He called them to follow Him.

Peter's call to discipleship (Matt. 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–18; Luke 5:1–11). Matthew and Mark gives quite sparse accounts of the disciples' call. Luke fills in many details and relates the special role Peter played.

Jesus had been preaching to large crowds that kept pressing in on Him. Jesus borrowed Peter's boat, put out from the shore, and taught from there. Afterward Jesus told Peter to launch into deeper water and let down his nets. Peter was skeptical. Fishermen on Galilee worked at night, not during the day, and the night before they'd caught nothing. Peter, who knew the ways of the fish, was sure there was nothing there to catch. "Nevertheless," Peter said, "at Your word I will let down the net" (Luke 5:5). When a great school of fish swarmed into the net, Peter was stunned. When they returned to shore with boats almost sinking from the weight of the fish, Peter fell on his knees and begged Jesus, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (5:9). This simple nature miracle convinced Peter as nothing else had that Jesus truly was Lord. Moreover, seeing Jesus in this way made Peter deeply aware of his own sinfulness. It was not that Peter felt *unworthy* to be in Jesus' company; Peter felt *uncomfortable*.

Peter's reaction is a common one for those who possess spiritual sensitivity. The presence of the holy makes spiritually sensitive people recognize their own lack and makes them aware that they deserve God's judgment. Jesus immediately put this fear to rest, for Jesus intended to make Peter His companion. "From now on you will catch men" (Luke 5:10).

Today, we have only the same two choices Peter faced. We can invite Jesus to leave us alone or we can accept His invitation to become His followers. That day on Galilee, Peter and his friends made the right choice. "They forsook all and followed Him" (Luke 5:11).

Peter's budding faith (Matt. 14:22–33). The disciples had been with Jesus for some time and seen many miracles when, one evening, they found themselves trapped in a storm on the Sea of Galilee.

The Sea of Galilee rests between high hills that often funnel winds across the water. The storms that toss the sea come up suddenly, and are often fierce. This storm was exceptionally violent, and row as they would, the disciples could make little progress. Unexpectedly, they saw a figure walking on the water toward them. The disciples' first thought was that the figure was a ghost, a supernatural apparition. Then Jesus spoke to them, and they recognized Him. Excited, Peter shouted out, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." And when Jesus said, "Come," Peter unhesitatingly stepped over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But then Peter realized what he had said and where he was. Shifting his gaze from Christ to the white-capped waves, Peter began to sink.

Immediately Peter cried out to Jesus, "Lord, save me," and Christ lifted him up and helped him into the boat.

Much has been made of Christ's mild rebuke in which He called Peter a "little-faith" and asked, "Why did you doubt?" More should be made of the insight the incident gives into Peter. Peter was impetuous, yes. Peter may have had little faith, but Peter had more faith than the others did who stayed in the boat and watched! When Peter began to sink, his first thought was



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to call out to Christ. Today the faith still needs men who are willing to step out into life's storms and who, even though they may begin to sink, will quickly call on Jesus to save.

Peter's confession of Christ (Matt. 16:13–28). For at least eighteen months, Jesus traveled through Jewish territory in Galilee and Judea. His preaching and His miracles were now well known, and wherever Jesus went He drew crowds. Yet the crowds viewed Jesus merely as a prophet, albeit a great prophet. When Jesus asked His disciples who they said He was, Peter spoke: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matt. 16:16).

Jesus attributed Peter's correct response to God's work in Peter's heart: "This was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in heaven" (16:12 NIV). Then Jesus went on to say two things to Peter that have been greatly misunderstood: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (16:18). The modern Roman Catholic Church views this statement as Peter's commissioning to be the church's first pope. However, even the church fathers to whom the Catholic Church appeals differ on what Jesus was saying. Three views have been argued:

- Peter is the rock.
- Christ is the rock.
- Peter's confession is the rock.

Part of the confusion comes from the name "Peter," *petros*, which means *stone* in Greek. But the term here for "rock" is *petra*. While the similarity between *petros* and *petra* is obvious, the words are not the same, and the verse might be best understood as "You are Pebble, and on this boulder I will build my church." The chances are that Peter the Pebble is not the boulder Christ referred to!

Noting this, some of the church fathers argued that the boulder on which the church rests is the confession of Christ as the Son of God. This has much to commend it, for acknowledging Christ as God the Son lies at the heart of the New Testament revelation. Even so, it is more likely that the boulder is Christ Himself, the subject of Peter's confession. The gates of hell will not prevail against the church because Jesus *is* God, and His power is fully invested in protecting His own. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:11, "No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

"I give unto you the keys to the kingdom" (Matt. 16:19). This verse, too, is important in Roman Catholic theology. The church assumes that the "keys" passed from Peter to pope after pope. Thus the Catholic Church claims to hold the keys that open heaven's door to the faithful through the sacraments. Protestants have, however, pointed out that Peter used his keys in preaching the gospel first to the Jews (Acts 2; 3) and then to the Gentiles (Acts 10; 11). In using the keys Peter, by articulating the gospel, threw open the door of salvation to all who believe. With the door flung open, never to be shut, "keys" become irrelevant.

While Matthew 16 is important in the study of theology, we look at the passage to learn more of Peter the man. Peter had already displayed spiritual sensitivity; now we see him grow in his responsiveness to God's will. But, at the same time, we see a person who has a long way to go!

Immediately after Peter's bold confession of Christ as the Son of God, Peter rebuked Jesus for predicting His death on the cross! When Jesus spoke of His coming death, Peter blurted out, "Far be it from You!" (Matt. 16:22). The very idea seemed unthinkable!



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And Jesus, who had just praised Peter, now rebuked him: “Get behind Me, Satan.” Peter, who had so quickly taken God’s part, now promoted a course that would have delighted Satan, not the Lord.

How like Peter we all seem to be. We have insights into God’s will and His ways. At the same time, we all too frequently take a course that runs counter to God’s. We may be motivated, as Peter was, by a love for Jesus. But good motives are no substitute for an understanding of and submission to God’s will.

At the same time, we need to recognize Peter’s quickness to speak and act as one of his strengths. Peter was not one of those persons who hesitate until the opportunity for action passes. Peter was ready to act, wisely or unwisely, on what he believed right.

Christ is still able to correct those who in their zeal for Him act unwisely. But it is the immovable, the waiting, and the hesitant who pass on life’s opportunities and accomplish nothing for the Lord.

Peter spoke too quickly (Matt. 17:24–26). One day Peter was approached by those who collected the temple tax—an annual payment due the Jerusalem temple from every adult Jewish male. The tax collectors asked if Christ paid the tax, and Peter blurted out, “Of course!” Later, Christ spoke with Peter about it, asking whether rulers collected taxes from sons or from strangers. Peter gave the obvious answer: from strangers.

Jesus’ question communicated a fascinating insight. That all Jewish males were to pay a temple tax demonstrated the truth that mere physical descent from Abraham did not make anyone a child of God! The temple tax was collected from strangers, not sons! But should Jesus then pay the temple tax? Again the lesson was no. Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Son of the living God!

Jesus sent Peter to the seashore where he caught a fish in whose mouth was a coin large enough to pay the temple tax for both Peter and Christ. Peter was again reminded that despite being one of Jesus’ disciples, Peter was not qualified to answer questions that should have been addressed to Christ Himself. Again, we see Peter as impetuous, perhaps even unthinking. We see him as a person who despite spiritual sensitivity still lacked insight into the underlying significance of issues on which he too readily spoke.

Peter denied Christ (Matt. 26). As the day of Christ’s crucifixion approached, Jesus warned His disciples that He was soon to die. He also warned them that in that hour they would desert Him. Peter couldn’t believe Christ’s words. Didn’t Jesus know how committed he and the others were to their Master? So Peter blurted out, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You” (Matt. 26:35). The others followed Peter’s lead and protested their loyalty. And even when Jesus told Peter that before morning came Peter would deny Him three times, Peter couldn’t imagine anything that would make him deny His Lord.

Later than night, a mob led by Judas found Christ in Gethsemane. As usual, Peter showed himself braver than the others. He tried to protect Jesus, and even cut off the ear of one of the high priest’s servants with his knife (the same word in Greek is translated both “knife” and “sword”) (John 18:10). Jesus told Peter to put his weapon away, and, powerless, Peter fled as the others had done. But even then, Peter followed the mob that led Jesus away, and slipped into the courtyard of the high priest’s home.



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Peter boldly tried to defend Jesus when He was taken by the mob led by Judas.

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When a servant girl said she recognized Peter as one of Jesus' followers, Peter vehemently denied any association with Christ. Later, he repeated his denial when recognized by another girl, and finally denied Jesus a third time when some bystanders commented on Peter's Galilean accent. Only when the cock crew, and Jesus, being led out of the house, looked across the courtyard and caught Peter's eye, did Peter realize what he had done.

Then he went out and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:75).

In this we see Peter at his best and his worst. He was so full of self-confidence that he rejected Christ's words of warning. He was bold and fearless, but at the same time cowardly. He was ready to face a mob with nothing but a fisherman's knife, yet caved in before the accusations of a slave girl. Despite his gifts of leadership and his willingness to risk, Peter seems surprising unstable, and all too quick to act without giving serious thought to what he said and did.

Peter's recommissioning by Christ (John 21). Events associated with the earliest days after the resurrection show that Peter was as eager as anyone to establish Christ's return to life. Peter and John both ran to the tomb when they heard it was empty, and although the younger John outran Peter, Peter was the first to enter the empty tomb and discover the grave cloths in which Jesus had been wrapped, lying there empty.

Later the disciples were fishing in Galilee, and Jesus appeared on the shore. When Peter realized it was Jesus, he tore off his outer cloak and plunged into the sea to swim to Him. Despite this evidence of Peter's continuing love for the Lord, Peter seems to have held back on that occasion. While the others crowded around Jesus, Peter dragged a net filled with fish up on the shore (John 21:11). But after they had all shared breakfast, Jesus singled Peter out.

Three times Jesus asked Peter if Peter loved him, and three times Peter professed his love for Christ. There is an interplay in the Greek that is not reflected in our English versions. The first two times Christ asked Peter, "Do you love me," He used the Greek word *agape*. This word, a rather neutral word in secular Greek, is used in Scripture to express the utterly amazing love of God seen in Jesus' sacrifice of Himself for us. God's love is a love that consciously, purposefully, acts for the benefit of the one loved whatever the cost to the lover.

When Peter answered Jesus' questions, "Do you love me?" with "Yes, Lord, You know that I love you," Peter used a different word for "love." That word was used in both secular and biblical Greek to represent a deep affection for the one loved, but not the total commitment of *agape* love.

Finally, when Jesus asked Peter a third time, "Do you love me," Jesus used Peter's word for love. And Peter responded with that same affirmation of a "deep affection" love for His Lord.

Much has been made of the interchange of the words for love used here. But perhaps the best explanation is that Peter had at last recognized his own fallibility. Peter had been so sure that His commitment to Jesus would carry him victoriously through any test. But Peter had failed. Now Peter, deeply aware of his weakness, was unwilling to profess a depth of commitment that



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he might not be able to maintain. Peter knew he loved Jesus as Lord. But Peter also knew that without a supernatural source of power, his love, however great, would not enable him to be the man he wanted to be.

Jesus accepted Peter's three professions of love. And Jesus commissioned Peter to "feed my lambs." Peter's denial of Christ had not disqualified him from the leadership role Christ intended Peter to fill. For failure there is forgiveness. And, as Peter was about to learn, for our weaknesses there is God's own strength.

Peter's leadership after the ascension (Acts 1). Despite the fact that Peter's companions must have been well aware of his weaknesses, he remained their acknowledged leader in the days following Christ's ascension. Peter's name is first on the list of the disciples turned apostles (Acts 1:13), and it was Peter who stood up and, applying Psalm 109:8, called for the selection of a man who had been with the disciples from the beginning to take the traitor Judas's place. Peter took the lead. The others followed.

Whatever we may say about Peter's flaws, he was a man others looked up to, a man of influence.

Peter's first sermons (Acts 2; 3). On the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit Jesus had promised to His disciples filled the little company of believers and gave birth to the church, Peter took public leadership of the little band. Miraculous signs that amazed the people of Jerusalem marked the Spirit's coming. Peter stepped forward to announce that Christ, the promised Messiah, had died and risen again that all who believe in Him might be forgiven. Peter's sermon was powerful, not because he was a great orator, but because the truth of his words was borne to the hearts of many by the Holy Spirit. Acts tells us that 3,000 were saved that day. Acts goes on to report another powerful sermon preached by Peter after the healing of a man who had been lame from birth.

Peter, the man who had been such a natural leader despite his glaring weaknesses, was now filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The disciple had become an apostle, not only sent by God but also equipped by God for ministry.

Peter's mission to Cornelius (Acts 10; 11). The earliest Christian church was a Jewish church, and no one at that time expected Gentiles to become believers on a spiritual par with Jews. Peter, like the other earliest believers, was convinced that the Jews were God's chosen people and that Jesus was the Jews' Messiah. But Peter was both teachable and willing to take a stand for what God taught him.



The first large-scale conversion of Gentiles to Christ took place in the home of the retired Roman centurion, Cornelius.



God showed Peter a vision: a group of animals that Old Testament dietary laws classified as unclean, and God commanded Peter to kill and eat them. Shocked, the apostle refused, only to hear God's voice telling him not to classify as "unclean" what God had cleansed. The vision was



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repeated, and as Peter puzzled over its meaning, messengers from a Roman centurion named Cornelius knocked on the door of the home where Peter was staying.

In the first century, pious Jews considered Gentiles unclean and would not enter a Gentile's home for fear of being ritually polluted. Peter immediately realized that God had sent the vision to show him that he was to go to Cornelius's home. Once there, Peter spoke of Jesus, and the entire company was not only converted but began to speak in tongues as the disciples themselves had on the Day of Pentecost.

When Peter returned to Jerusalem, he told what had happened, and argued that since the Gentiles had not only trusted in Christ but that the Holy Spirit had also shown His presence in them, these Gentiles must be considered believers, full members in Christ's church. The apostles and elders agreed, glorifying God that "God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life" (Acts 11:18).

Clearly Peter had become more teachable. At the same time, he had maintained his influence as a leader.

Peter's failure in Antioch (Gal. 2:11–21). Some time later, Peter visited a Gentile church in the city of Antioch that Paul and several elders and prophets led. Peter fit in well, enjoying his fellowship with Gentile believers—until a group of Jewish Christians came down from Jerusalem to visit. When they arrived, Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles that he might follow the strict Jewish dietary laws. Paul immediately confronted Peter. Peter's actions implied that Gentile believers were second-class Christians. Peter's actions were hypocritical. Worse than that, they cast doubt on the gospel message that salvation was by faith apart from works, a free gift to all who would place their trust in Christ. While Paul did not say so, it's clear that Peter accepted the rebuke and changed.

Peter's stand at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). It had been relatively easy for the church in Judea to accept the few Gentiles who believed. As the gospel spread beyond the Jewish homeland, tensions emerged. More and more Gentiles came to Christ until the church outside Palestine was predominantly Gentile, drawn from a population with customs that differed radically from Jewish customs. Soon a faction emerged that insisted that Gentile Christians should adopt the Law of Moses and follow Jewish customs.

The apostle Paul fought this movement, convinced that any who relied on keeping the Law as a means for living in vital relationship with God denied grace and misunderstood the implications of the gospel. The matter became so divisive that finally a council was held to settle the matter. Paul reported on God's work among the Gentiles, arguing against the position that the Gentile believers must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. Peter, now clearly grasping the significance of this issue, supported Paul's position. Peter argued strongly that since God "made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" that there was no reason to test God by "putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:9, 10). Salvation was and must remain a matter of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:11).

Paul, Peter, and James the brother of Jesus who chaired the council carried the day, and the council officially rejected any confusion of faith with works.

We know little from Scripture about Peter's later life. We have two letters written by Peter preserved in the New Testament. The letters are addressed to Jewish Christians scattered



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throughout the Roman Empire and the East. Yet, from the material we have in the Gospels and in Acts we can draw a rather accurate picture of Peter, the prince of the apostles, who truly was the leader among Jesus' disciples and later one of the most influential leaders of the early Christian church.

PETER: AN EXAMPLE FOR TODAY

Peter was a successful businessman and a natural leader. He was enthusiastic and impulsive, quick to speak and quick to act. While driven by the best of motives, Peter was not always wise in what he said and did. Yet, Peter was open to God and teachable. He was the acknowledged leader of the disciples and of the earliest church, and the man God chose to open the door of the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike. We truly have much to learn from Simon Peter.

- Peter reminds us that men who are willing to step out and take risks have great value in God's kingdom. Men who are willing to put themselves on the line and who will lead by example are at a premium today as in the first century.
- Peter challenges those who come to Christ later in life. Peter was mature and a successful businessman when called to follow Jesus. Many like Peter today seek second careers in ministry.
- Peter encourages us not to expect too much from our leaders. Peter was a man with flaws as great as his strengths. Yet his commitment to Christ shines through. Our leaders, too, will be imperfect. We need to encourage them, not judge them or gossip about their flaws.
- Peter alerts us to the dangers of too much self-confidence. None of us is immune to temptations or to failure. None of us is so strong that we can follow Jesus in our own strength.
- Peter encourages us to believe in growth and change. Peter made mistakes, but he increasingly displayed a teachable spirit and a desire better to carry out God's will. And Peter matured! In this, Peter is an encouragement to all.
- Peter focuses our attention on trust in Christ and empowerment by His Spirit as the secret of spiritual accomplishment. Peter's natural gifts were great, but they were not enough. When Peter kept his eyes on Christ and relied on the Spirit, He did his greatest work for the Lord.⁸

⁸ Richards, L. (1999). [*Every man in the Bible*](#) (pp. 167–177). Nashville: T. Nelson.