

Meet Peter



SABBATH—MARCH 25

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Luke 5:1–11; Matthew 16:13–17; Matthew 14:22–33; Luke 22:31–34, 54–62.

MEMORY VERSE: “But when Peter saw the wind, he was afraid. He began to sink. He cried out, ‘Lord! Save me!’ Right away Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ‘Your faith is so small!’ he said. ‘Why did you doubt me?’” (Matthew 14:30, 31, NlrV).



Peter knew what it meant to be forgiven.

DEFINITIONS

1. Gospels—the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

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

PETER WROTE the two letters or books known as 1 and 2 Peter. He was one of the first followers of Jesus. Peter stayed with Jesus during His work here on earth. And Peter was one of the first disciples to see Jesus’ empty tomb. So Peter experienced many things that helped him to write these two powerful letters. (Read 2 Peter 1:16.) And the Holy Spirit guided Peter in his writing.

Peter appears often in the stories found in the Gospels.¹ These stories show us Peter’s triumphs and failures and his strengths and weaknesses. Usually, he spoke to Jesus for the other disciples during Jesus’ time on earth. Then Jesus rose from the dead and went to heaven. And Peter became a well-known leader among the first Christian believers. The book of Acts talks about Peter. So does the book of Galatians.

Most important, Peter knew what it meant to make mistakes. He knew what it meant to be forgiven. And he knew what it took to move forward in faith with a humble (not proud) heart. Peter experienced for himself the grace² of God. We need to experience that same grace too. That is why Peter is still a powerful voice for us today.

“GO AWAY FROM ME!” (Luke 5:1–9)

Who is Peter? And what is he doing when we first meet him in the first three books of the New Testament? Peter is on the Sea of Galilee, and he is fishing (Matthew 4:18; Mark 1:16; and Luke 5:1–11).

Read Luke 5:1–9. What do Peter’s words to Jesus in Luke 5:8 tell us about Peter and his spiritual condition? That is, what true understanding do Peter’s words give us about his spiritual condition?

Jesus must have had a strong effect on Peter. And Peter must have been impressed by what he knew of Jesus. Now, before the miracle of the fish happens, Jesus tells the group to put their nets down into the water. Peter seems to have trouble believing what Jesus says. After all, Peter and his men just have spent all night fishing. And they have caught nothing. Still Peter says to Jesus, “‘But because you say so, I will let down the nets’” (verse 5, NIV). It seems that Peter must have known something about Jesus already. And what Peter knows causes him to obey. Indeed, there is enough proof to show that Peter already had been with Jesus for awhile before this event.

Perhaps Luke 5:3 can help us understand why Peter is so ready to obey Jesus. Luke 5:3 talks about what happens before the miracle of the fish. “He [Jesus] got into the boat that belonged to Simon [Peter]. Jesus asked him to go out a little way from shore. Then he sat down in the boat and taught the people” (NIV). In other words, Peter also listened to Jesus’ words. Maybe the words Jesus spoke in the boat are the reason Peter is so ready to obey Him.

Then Jesus does the miracle. And then Peter senses something more in Jesus, something holy. It is something that Peter does not have. So Peter sees himself as a sinner. He also is willing to speak this truth in public. Saying in public that he is a sinner shows just how open Peter is to the Lord. No wonder Jesus calls Peter to follow Him! Yes, Peter has many faults. But he is a spiritual man. And he is ready to follow the Lord, regardless of the cost.

Read Luke 5:11. What important rule do we find in this verse? These fishermen are willing to give up everything when their nets are full. What does this remarkable fact teach us about how much loyalty Jesus requires from us?



Maybe the words Jesus spoke in the boat are the reason Peter is so ready to obey Him.

PETER CONFESSES THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST
(Matthew 16:13–17)

Read Matthew 16:13–17. What is happening in these verses? What is the importance of Peter’s words to Jesus?

Here Peter speaks boldly of his faith in Jesus. And Matthew 16:20 clearly shows that others share Peter’s belief that Jesus is the Messiah (Chosen One). What happens at this moment is a turning point in the work of Jesus. Still, the disciples, including Peter, have much more to learn.

“The disciples still expect Christ to rule as a prince on this earth. Christ had kept His true plans secret for so long. But the disciples believed that He would not always remain poor and unknown. The time was near when He would establish His kingdom. But the hatred of the priests and rabbis against Christ would never be overcome. And Christ would be rejected by His own nation. He would be accused of being a liar. And He would be put to death on a cross as a criminal. But the disciples never thought about these terrible things.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 415.

Even so the disciples accept Jesus as the Messiah. Then Jesus begins teaching that He must suffer and die (read Matthew 16:21–23). But Peter cannot accept this teaching. Peter goes so far as to “scold” Jesus. Jesus then turns to Peter and says, “ ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ ” (Matthew 16:23, NIV). These words are some of the harshest things that Jesus says to anybody during His ministry. But Jesus says them for Peter’s own good. This is because Peter’s words show his own desires. They show his own selfish attitude about what he wants. So Jesus has to stop him in his tracks, right then and there. (Now Jesus is really speaking to Satan. But Peter gets the message.) Peter needs to learn that serving the Lord involves suffering. It is clear from Peter’s writings later on that he learns this lesson (read 1 Peter 4:12).



Peter needs to learn that serving the Lord involves suffering.

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

WALKING ON WATER (Matthew 14:22–33)

Read the story in Matthew 14:22–33. What is the most important message of this story? How will it help us in our own walk with the Lord?

Jesus feeds the crowd of more than five thousand. His disciples witness in a remarkable way the power of Jesus through this miracle. He truly has control over the natural world. Because Peter has just seen this miracle, that power must be part of the reason Peter is so sure of himself. And so he makes his bold request: “ ‘Lord, is it you?’ Peter asked. ‘If it is, tell me to come to you on the water’ ” (Matthew 14:28, NIV).

What remarkable words of faith!

Jesus accepts Peter’s expression of faith. He tells Peter to step out of the boat onto the water. Peter obeys. His stepping out of the boat is another expression of faith. It would have been one thing to walk on water when it was calm. But Peter walks on water in the middle of a storm!

The lesson we often are taught from this story is not to take our eyes off Jesus. But there is more. Peter surely must have trusted in Jesus. His trust gives him the faith to make his bold request to Jesus. And faith gives Peter the strength to do what Jesus tells him to do. So Peter steps out onto the water. But then he gets scared. And he begins to sink.

Why? Could not Jesus have kept Peter afloat regardless of Peter’s fear? Of course! But Jesus allows Peter to reach the point where he is helpless. Peter can do nothing but cry out, “ ‘Lord! Save me!’ ” (Matthew 14:30, NIV). Then Jesus stretches out His hand. He does just what Peter asks. The Bible describes what happens this way: “Right away Jesus reached out his hand and caught him” (Matthew 14:31, NIV). Jesus easily could have kept Peter afloat without touching him. But Jesus reaches out and pulls Peter out of the water. Surely Jesus’ touch helps Peter realize just how much he needs to learn to depend upon Jesus.

We can start out in great faith. And we can trust in the power of our Lord. But sometimes the situations we are in will get frightful. Then we need to remember Jesus’ words to Peter: “ ‘Your faith is so small!’ [Jesus] said. ‘Why did you doubt me?’ ” (Matthew 14:31, NIV).



Jesus’ touch helps Peter realize just how much he needs to learn to depend on Jesus.

CASTING OFF HIS LORD (Luke 22:31–34, 54–62)

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

Peter wants to do what is right. And, in fact, he shows more courage than the other disciples do. He actually follows Jesus in order to discover what will happen to Him. But in doing so Peter decides to hide his true identity. This wrong deed causes him to leave the path of what is good and right. It leads him to cast off his Lord *three times*. And Jesus warned Peter beforehand that Peter would do exactly that.

This story of Peter teaches us in a sad way how terrible it is to give in to what is wrong.

Christian history is soiled with the terrible results that happen when Christians give up important truths. It is true that life itself often involves giving in and meeting others halfway. And we at times must be willing to give and take. But we must stand firm in the truth. As a people, we must learn to never give up our belief in important truths. We must stand firm in the truth at all times. (Read, for example, Revelation 14:12.)

Ellen G. White tells us that Peter starts to give in to what is wrong in Gethsemane. Instead of praying, he sleeps. So he is not spiritually ready for what is coming. Peter should have been faithful in prayer. Then “he would not have cast off his Lord.”—Adapted from *The Desire of Ages*, page 714.

Yes, Peter fails terribly. His failure is great. But God’s grace is even greater. “But where sin increased, God’s grace increased even more” (Romans 5:20, NIV). In this way, Jesus’ forgiveness makes Peter one of the most important leaders of the early Christian church. What a powerful lesson for us all about the power of God’s grace! What a lesson to us all about how we should press ahead in faith, no matter what our failures are.

Yes, Peter knows what it means to be forgiven. He knows firsthand just what the gospel is all about. He experiences how sinful he really is. But he also experiences how deep and great God’s love and grace are toward sinners.

How can we learn to forgive people who have greatly disappointed us as Peter disappointed Jesus?



We must stand firm in the truth at all times.

PETER AS CHURCH LEADER (Galatians 1:18, 19)

Peter often acts as the leader of the 12 disciples during Jesus' work on earth. For example, Peter is the spokesman for the disciples. When Matthew lists the disciples, he says "First, . . . Peter" (Matthew 10:2, NIV). Peter also takes a leading role in the early church. And Peter is the one who suggests choosing a new disciple to replace Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus (Acts 1:15–25).

On the Day of Pentecost,³ it is Peter who explains to the crowds that God has poured out His Spirit upon His people (Acts 2:14–36). It is Peter who is arrested for speaking about the day when Jesus will raise the dead. And it is Peter who speaks to the high priest and the Jewish leaders (Acts 4:1–12). It is also Peter who is led to Cornelius. Cornelius is the first non-Jew to be accepted as a follower of Jesus (Acts 10:1–48). And it is Peter who Paul visits after he accepts Jesus as his Savior (Galatians 1:18). Later, Paul names three strong leaders of the church: Peter, James, the brother of Jesus, and John, the beloved disciple (Galatians 2:9).

Read Galatians 1:18, 19; and Galatians 2:9, 11–14. Peter is clearly a leading member of the early church. But what do these verses tell us about Peter?

In the early days of the church, almost all the Christians are Jews. Many of these "try very hard to obey the law" (Acts 21:20, NIV). For these Jewish Christians, eating with Gentiles (non-Jews) is a problem. The Jewish Christians believe that the law says that the Gentiles are unclean. Then, some Jewish Christians come to Antioch. They come from James, who is in Jerusalem. When they do, Peter stops eating with the Gentiles in Antioch.

For Paul, such behavior is an attack on the gospel itself. He sees Peter's actions as being two-faced. And Paul is not afraid to challenge Peter about the way he acted. In fact, Paul uses the opportunity to express the central teaching of the Christian faith. That teaching is the belief that we are saved by faith alone (read Galatians 2:14–16).

Peter has been called by God. But he has some faults that need correcting. How do we respond when others point out our own "blind spots" or faults?



We are saved by faith alone.

DEFINITIONS

3. Pentecost—the time when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the first Christian believers. Read Acts 2:1–4.



Peter's changed heart made him able to feed the lambs as well as the sheep of Christ's flock.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, "The Call by the Sea," pages 244–251; "A Night on the Lake," pages 377–382, in *The Desire of Ages*.

"Before [Peter's] great fall he was always very bold and bossy. He liked telling others what to do. He would speak without first thinking through what he would say. And he was always ready to correct others. But the Holy Spirit changed Peter. And the new Peter was very different from the bold Peter who acted without first thinking things through. The new Peter still had his same old eagerness. But now the grace of Christ regulated his eager desire. Peter was no longer someone who acted without thinking. He was no longer too sure of himself. And he was not full of pride. Instead, he was calm. He had control over his feelings and actions. And he was someone who was willing to learn. His changed heart made him able to feed the lambs as well as the sheep of Christ's flock."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies⁴ for the Church*, volume 5, pages 334, 335.

We can all relate to Peter in some way, can we not? Who has not stood boldly for his or her faith? And who has not failed miserably?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Peter turns away from Jesus. But Peter still becomes such an important leader in the Christian faith itself. What do these facts tell us about the grace of God? What lessons can we take from Peter's being brought back to God? And what can Peter's change teach us about how to deal with those who have failed the Lord?
- ② In class, talk more about the dangers of giving up the truth. How can we know the difference between the things we can give in to and those things that we must never give up? What examples of giving up the truth do we find in church history? How does giving up the truth lead to disaster? What lessons can we learn from these events?
- ③ Peter learns some lessons the hard way. Look carefully at his mistakes. How can we learn the lessons we need to learn in an easier way than Peter learned his?

DEFINITIONS

4. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.