

A Walk Thru the Life of

# PETER

*Growing Bold Faith*

Walk Thru the Bible



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# Introduction

Jerry has been sitting behind the same desk for the past five years, but this morning is different. No longer is he a marketing representative; today, he's the company's new vice president. He has been dreaming about this day for a long time. He's full of hope, but he's also rattled by huge doubts. Does he have what it takes to succeed in his new position? What if he fails?

Just twenty-four hours ago, Karen was listening to her pastor speak about how followers of Jesus should stand up for their faith. It inspired her so much that she resolved to be bolder. Yet during her morning break today, a couple of coworkers were making fun of Christians, and what did she do? She bit her lip and slipped out of the break room.

Part of Steve wants to be the best husband he can be, and part of him just wants to shut everyone out—especially when he's tired or has a lot on his mind. And lately that happens far too often. His desire to be a better husband gets overruled by his desire to do his own thing.

Like Jerry, Karen, and Steve, Peter, the leader of Jesus's chosen twelve, knew what it was like to struggle, to doubt, to achieve, to fail, to hit the bull's eye, and to miss the target completely. And in spite of all that, Jesus called him a "rock." He was the

disciple Jesus often called upon as a spokesman for the others. The only disciple to ever say “no” to the Lord. The one who defiantly professed he would die for the Master. The disciple who, when Jesus needed support the most, blatantly denied even knowing him.

Brimming with competing strengths and weaknesses, Simon Peter had a nature much like ours. One minute, he would boldly walk on water. In the next, he would cry out in mortal fear as he sank. While wanting with all his heart to act nobly, he frequently found himself taking the easy way out. At times when he should have remained quiet, he opened his mouth and said things he instantly regretted. He was the spiritual equivalent of someone biting off more than he can chew.

If you can relate to Peter wanting to do one thing but coming up short, then there’s good news. Just as Jesus never gave up on Peter, he will never give up on you. And just as Peter eventually grew to become the follower of Jesus he desperately wanted to be, God has the same plans for you.

In the course of your study of Peter’s life, you’ll get to know this vocal disciple better than ever. You’ll gain a better idea of his strengths and weaknesses. You’ll spot the obstacles that tripped him up, and you’ll discover that the world Peter lived in and the issues he faced are not as far removed from us as we might think.

Like Peter, you have strengths and weaknesses. You may experience moments of peace punctuated by seasons of worries, troubles, and trials. Though you enjoy impressive triumphs in your spiritual walk, you’ve also been known to stub your spiritual toe, stumble, and fall. And that, apparently, is okay. It simply means you’re living on the human side of glory. It also means that, like Peter, you can become exactly who God

has destined you to be. And just as Peter was Jesus's friend, so are you.

## Cephas

Simon was vigorous and strong. As a fisherman, he had to be. The fisherman's life was a hard and busy one, with frequent long nights of setting large nets and pulling them back in. As commercial fishing is today, so was Peter's job one of the riskiest and most deadly occupations in the world. Violent storms would frequently whip up the Sea of Galilee virtually without warning, threatening the lives of all trying to ride its ravaging waves.

Because of his unapologetic declaration of Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus called Simon "the Rock." And he fulfilled his nickname: he demonstrated both the positives and the negatives of being stubbornly unmovable. The sinful side of stubbornness would have made him an obstacle. But in the Spirit, he was a constant strength during persecution.

Peter was a family man. In fact, based on the Scriptures and the layout of what archeologists believe to be his house in Capernaum, it seems that Peter's mother-in-law, his brother Andrew, and perhaps Andrew's family lived with him and his wife. He was also a leader. Every time the disciples are listed, his name is first. And he was a man of faith—the only disciple to step out on water.

Peter's stop-and-start spirituality gave way on the day of Pentecost to bold and consistent ministry in Jerusalem and beyond. He became one of the leaders of the early church—the first to embrace the Spirit's work among Gentiles and one of the foremost apostles to the Jews. His missionary travels eventually led him to Rome where, under the emperor Nero, he would give his life for Jesus.

## How to Use This Guide

The questions in this guide are geared to elicit every participant's input, regardless of his or her level of preparation. Obviously, the more group members prepare by reading the biblical text and the background information in the study guide, the more they will get out of it. But even in busy weeks that afford no preparation time, everyone will be able to participate in a meaningful way.

The discussion questions also allow your group quite a bit of latitude. Some groups prefer to briefly discuss the questions in order to cover as many as possible, while others focus only on one or two of them in order to have more in-depth conversations. Since this study is designed for flexibility, feel free to adapt it according to the personality and needs of your group.

Each session ends with a hypothetical situation that relates to the passage of the week. Discussion questions are provided, but group members may also want to consider role-playing the scenario or setting up a two-team debate over one or two of the questions. These exercises often cultivate insights that wouldn't come out of a typical discussion.

Regardless of how you use this material, the biblical text will always be the ultimate authority. Your discussions may take you to many places and cover many issues, but they will have the greatest impact when they begin and end with God's Word itself. And never forget that the Spirit who inspired the Word is in on the discussion too. May he guide it—and you—wherever he wishes.

## Calling

“Meir said he and Miriam were going to hear him,” Erez told his wife, Hadassah, while pulling his tunic over his head.

“When?” she asked.

Erez straightened the tunic and shrugged. “I don’t know. Soon, I think.”

He walked over to the table where Hadassah was making his breakfast, packing some olives inside yesterday’s bread. “Do you think he could really be the one?” Erez asked, tinged of excitement and hope in his voice. He lifted dark, handsome eyes while waiting for his wife to answer.

“Erez, you know more than I about such things. Do you?”

“I don’t know. I can’t see where living in the wilderness like a wild man and dipping people in the water would make you a prophet.”

Hadassah handed the bread to her husband and laid a hand on his shoulder. “You want to go see him, don’t you?” she asked.

He sighed and shook his head. “When would I ever get time?” He kissed her on the forehead and left for work, eating his breakfast along the way.

Hadassah stepped to the door and watched her husband walk down the road. He was a good, hardworking man, currently employed to pave the dusty streets of Capernaum with small stones.

When Erez rounded the corner out of site, Hadassah whispered to herself, “Well . . . I’ve got a lot to do today.” Her to-do list was longer than a camel’s neck, and topping the list was a trip to the fish market for some sardines the fishermen would have caught overnight.

These days, she looked forward to her trips to the market. There was always news, and recently something very interesting had been fueling the gossip. It seemed that the same thing that had caught her husband’s attention had gotten the whole town talking. Many in Capernaum had even traveled down the banks

## LIVING IN A FISH BOWL

Imagine living less than one hundred feet from the only church in town, and instead of cars zooming past your house, chattering people—people who know who you are—amble slowly by your front door on their way to worship? Would you feel as though you were living in a fish bowl?

Archeologists believe they have found Peter’s house, and it’s only a stone’s throw from the Capernaum synagogue where Jesus did much of his teaching. His home eventually became a house church where believers met to worship. In the fifth century, an octagonal-shaped church was built on the site. Recent excavations of the original house have uncovered fish hooks and hundreds of graffiti markings on the walls, some of which refer to Jesus, Peter, and other early Christian figures.

of the Jordan to see the baptizer Yochannon. He was a strange, Elijah-like figure—a voice in the wilderness, attired in camel hair, living on a diet of locusts and wild honey.

Whatever he was—prophet or peculiarity—people from towns all around were flocking to hear him preach. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” he would shout. Then he would immerse the repentant in the river.

Maybe today at the market there would be fresh news of this prophet. Maybe someone would know what he meant by “kingdom of heaven.” And maybe—just maybe—Hadassah and Erez would soon travel to the Jordan to see for themselves.



Such might have been a common scene in Capernaum just days prior to Jesus entering the town, calling some of its young men—including Simon—to follow him. The section of the Jordan River where John the Baptist might have been preaching was not far away, and Scripture tells us that people were flocking to see him. Many of them probably wondered if the baptizer might be a long-awaited prophet or even the Messiah.

God was busy orchestrating events. The baptizer was center-stage, urging people everywhere to turn from their sins. Soon he would point people to the Messiah. And the Messiah would enter the bustling town where he spent much time with his friend Simon.

### **The Gaze: John 1:35–42**

Andrew has been a disciple of the Baptizer. One day when he is with his teacher, Jesus comes walking by. “Behold the Lamb

## PETER'S BOAT?

In 1986, after several years of drought, the water level in the Sea of Galilee dropped low enough to expose the outline of a genuine first-century fishing boat. The boat was carefully extracted and is now on display at the Nof Ginosar Kibbutz. At twenty-six feet long and seven and a half feet wide, it's easily large enough to carry several fishermen, their nets, and a nice catch of fish . . . or, perhaps, a Savior and twelve of his followers. Though the natural odds of this boat having actually belonged to Simon Peter are very slim, the discovered vessel is exactly the kind Peter and Andrew (or James and John) would have owned.

of God!” John announces (John 1:36). Andrew and another of John’s disciples leave to follow Jesus.

The first thing Andrew wants to do is share the news of the Messiah. After spending the day with Jesus, his first impulse is to find his brother Simon. “We have found the Messiah,” he exclaims.

*The Messiah?* Simon must have wondered. To his credit, he believes enough to accompany his excited brother to see Jesus. When they meet, Jesus looks at him, gazing deep into his soul. Jesus sees the real Simon—what he will become—and gives him a prophetic name: “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (John 1:42). *Cephas*, or *kefa*, is Aramaic; it’s *petros* in Greek, and *stone* in English. This disciple will be a rock.

### Discuss

- Imagine Jesus gazing into your soul as he did with Peter. What obstacles might he see that could hinder you from

serving him the way he desires? What potential might he see in you?

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- If you encountered Jesus while going about your business today, what do you think would he call you to do?

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### **The Call: Matthew 4:18–22; Luke 5:1–11**

We’ve seen how Andrew brought his brother, Simon, to Jesus—and how Jesus identifies his potential as a solid leader (John 1:35–42).

Matthew 4:18–22 details a second instance of Simon’s call. Simon and Andrew are busy casting their nets into the Sea of Galilee when Jesus approaches. “Come, follow me,” he says, “and I will make you fishers of men” (4:19). The brothers drop their nets and follow.

Some time later, before Jesus has taken his new disciples beyond Capernaum, Simon and Andrew are at work again. Luke 5:1–11 tells of Jesus preaching by the shore as crowds press in to hear him. The brothers are washing their nets as their empty boats sit nearby. Jesus asks Simon to take him out from shore so he can use the boat as a platform for teaching the crowds. Later, Jesus returns the favor—and then some. He urges Simon to launch into deep water and let down his nets.

The result? So many fish that Simon has to call for help to haul them all in.

**Discuss**

- Has Jesus ever been as persistent with you as he apparently was with Peter? Has he ever convinced you that his authority and your call to service are legitimate?

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## A CASE STUDY

*Imagine:* You're a professional bass fisherman, and it's tournament time. At the starting gun, you jump in your boat and jet down the shoreline of the lake. When you get to what looks like a good spot, you start fishing, paying close attention to factors such as location, conditions, and changes in the environment. You use various tackle throughout the day—shiny lures, plastic worms, and more—tied to the end of a strong line that's wound onto high-tech reels secured to graphite poles.

- Do you think being a “fisher of men” requires a similar level of intentionality? Why or why not?
- Do you think the calling to fish for people was specifically for Peter and the disciples or for every Christian? To what extent do you see yourself as a fisher?
- What kinds of “tackle” do you think are most effective in drawing people into God's kingdom? What have you found to be ineffective? Why?