

25th November 2013

Week 13: Peter (A character study)

Day 1. Peter, the fisherman

Luke 5:1-11; John 1:35-42

Just suppose that you have been asked to write a biography of Peter. The only source material that you have to work with is to be found in the New Testament. Throughout the week, make a list of all the biographical details you might want to include - his background, activities, attitudes, relationships and any changes you detect in him over the years.

You could also asterisk any characteristics that you share with him. How did God deal with him? Might he treat you in the same way?

1. Begin by reading these two passages and listing the biographical details you discover. In what ways do you see yourself in Peter?
2. Peter followed Jesus voluntarily. But how had Jesus demonstrated that he was greater than Peter and worth following? In your own words, how did Peter respond to Jesus' authority?
3. Can you think of any who have such a limited view of Jesus, that they don't see the point in following him? How can you help them to see Jesus as he really is? (It may be that they are so proud and so blind that they are unable to recognize something of his greatness.) Pause to pray for them now.

In Peter's experience, he first needed to recognize who Jesus was, limited though that recognition may be. It was then that Jesus gave him the commission to follow him. How far has that been the pattern you can trace in your own life, when you became a Christian and subsequently in your Christian life?

Thank God for the way He has had His hand on your life.

Day 2. Peter, jumped in feet first

Matthew 14:22-33; 16:13-23; 26:31-35, 69-75

Each of these incidents will give you more information for your biography. Note down additional details of Peter's character. Asterisk those characteristics you share with him.

1. In your own words summarize how Jesus dealt with Peter on each of these occasions. Was Jesus treating him consistently?
2. Peter was always a man for action and speaking his mind. At times this was a good thing, but at other times his forwardness led to sin. Recently, when have

you been able to speak out for God or acted boldly and God has used you?
Praise God that he has used you.

3. On the other hand, when have you spoken or acted impetuously and without thought? You may not be reduced to the bitter tears which Peter shed, but **pause to ask** for God's forgiveness and an openness for him to reveal himself to you as he did to Peter (Matthew 16:17).

Day 3. Peter, with a job still to do

John 21

After reading this chapter, note the additional material you find there about Peter's life. In what ways can you identify with him?

Peter's denial of Jesus must have made a very deep mark on him. His bitter tears of regret and failure were not crocodile tears! But by this time, overjoyed that Jesus was alive again, he with the other disciples were in a period of waiting. But they hardly knew what they were waiting for. It would be quite natural, though, for them to go off on a fishing expedition.

1. Why was this conversation between Jesus and Peter so crucially important? What does it suggest about Jesus' attitude to failure and the way in which Peter himself responded to his failure? Is there any sense in which you have failed God and need to assure him of your love for him and willingness to serve him despite your failures? (Don't make one up for the sake of it!)
2. Have you known a time of uncertainty and waiting, possibly following a time of humiliation, emotional turmoil? Have you anguished over the need to make a decision about the future? What reassurance can you find from Jesus' conversation with Peter that God does not abandon those whom he loves, whom he intends to use in the future? If you are in such a period at the moment, **pray for yourself** in the light of what you have read and for any others that you know in such a situation.

Day 4. Peter, filled with the Spirit

Acts 4:1-22

By this stage there are definite signs that Peter was being changed, although he continued to make blunders throughout his life.

Read this section and note down any further information about Peter. The background of this passage is found in Acts 3.

1. Compare Peter here with Peter as we read about him in Matthew 26. How do you account for the difference? Acts 4:8 should give you one clue.
2. The Holy Spirit strengthened Peter for a particular situation when clarity of speech and boldness were essential. He was experiencing in practice the promise of Jesus in Mark 13:11. Pray for any you know who are involved in the work of spreading the gospel and speaking in hostile environments, that they may learn to rely on God to give them the right words to say. You ought

to include yourself in this!

3. You may not have identified yourself with Peter today, apart perhaps from seeing yourself as ordinary (verse 13)! But Peter made the most of the opportunity which was presented to him. How can you look out today for similar opportunities, although they may be of a less dramatic nature?

For Peter such an attitude involved considerable discomfort. How prepared are you for that? (At the end of the day, think about how you have used the last 24 hours to speak out for Jesus and to show him to others by the quality of your life. Have people been able to see that you have been a companion of Jesus?)

Pray for opportunities to share your faith and for those you want to see come to know Jesus.

Day 5. Peter, feeding the sheep

1 Peter 1:1-2; 5:1-14

Towards the end of his life, Peter wrote at least two letters to isolated groups of Christians, obeying the command of Jesus to be a shepherd to the sheep. He had some strong things to say to them, but his deep concern for his fellow Christians is very evident. If you had time you would enjoy reading the whole letter. However, start by reading these two extracts.

1. What insights do they give into Peter's character?
2. List the encouragements and instructions that he gives to his fellow Christians, especially the leaders.
3. His care for them is demonstrated by the high standards that he sets. Unlike Peter you are probably not in a position to give such instructions to many other Christians, but think of your Christian friends. What are your ambitions for them? Do you long for them to apply Peter's guidance to their own lives? Putting Peter's instructions into your own words, turn them into prayer bearing your friends in mind.
4. Peter has a special concern for his fellow elders, reminding them of their responsibilities. Pray for the leaders of your church, that they will be able to live up to the standards God requires of them.

Consider: It is easy for leaders to become discouraged. Can you think of some way in which you can encourage one of the leaders in your church this week?

Weekend

1. Look up all the references to Peter in a concordance. But also find time to look over your notes on what you have studied this week, noting especially the way in which God took Peter as he was, enthusiastic, outspoken and dominant, and used him, refined him and made him like Jesus.
2. We have not had time to read about Peter's contribution to the growth of the early church. You could do that on your own! Look at, for example, Acts 1:15-26; 2:14 - 3:26; 5:12-42; 10; 12:1-19.