

# telling our story

## the life of Peter

### AIMS

This is an interactive bible study on the life of Peter for small groups.

### INTRODUCTION

There are six suggested stages to this interactive bible study. It's up to you how long you spend on this but it could take more than one session. At stage 4 you might prefer to allocate participants to groups to make sure they are evenly distributed. When facilitating the reflection in stage 6 take account of the material given and any other material you have read about but try to have a discussion not a lecture. Use the information that other participants have discovered and try not to let one or two people (including the facilitator) dominate the discussion.

### STRUCTURE

Stage 1: In small groups, and from what you remember, what would you say about Peter?

Stage 2: There are around 170 references to Peter in the New Testament. These are not all unique, for often the same incidents are recorded in more than one gospel. Then there are the places where this disciple is simply referred to as Simon, although again both names often appear together. The following represent just some of the relevant **gospel** references: in your group look them up, then try to build up a character profile of Peter.

Matthew	4:18	<i>Call of Peter</i>
	8:14-15	<i>Peter's mother-in-law is healed</i>
	14:25-31	<i>Walking on water</i>
	15:15	<i>"Explain the parable to us"</i>
	16:13-19	<i>"You are the Christ"</i>
	16:21-24	<i>"Get behind me Satan!"</i>
	17:1-9	<i>Transfiguration</i>
	17:24-27	<i>Temple tax found in fish's mouth</i>
	18:21-22	<i>About forgiving 70 x 7</i>
	19:22-28	<i>"We have left everything to follow you"</i>
	26:31-75	<i>Peter's denial of Jesus</i>
Mark	5:37	<i>Jairus' daughter</i>
	11:21	<i>Fig tree withered</i>
	13:3	<i>With Jesus outside the temple</i>
	16:7	<i>Women instructed to tell Peter of resurrection</i>
Luke	5:8	<i>Miraculous catch of fish</i>

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	8:45	<i>Peter's surprise at qn "Who touched me?"</i>
	12:41	<i>"Are you telling this parable to us or everyone?"</i>
	22:8	<i>Peter instructed to prepare the Passover</i>
John	1:40-42	<i>Peter brought to Jesus by Andrew &amp; new name</i>
	6:68	<i>"Lord, to whom shall we go?"</i>
	13:6-9	<i>The feet washing</i>
	13:24	<i>At Passover, asks who will betray Jesus</i>
	20:1-10	<i>Peter runs to the tomb with John</i>
	21:1-22	<i>Peter's recommissioning</i>

Stage 3: Ask for *brief* feedback after exercise if time allows (otherwise you may leave this out).

Stage 4: Working with the picture of Peter you have been able to build up **so far** (ie gospel narratives only), imagine yourself in one of the following positions in relation to Peter:

- Careers advisor tasked with finding an appropriate job for Peter;
- Employment agency tasked with recruiting new disciples;
- Film director tasked with making a film about Peter's life;
- Manager of a dating agency tasked with writing Peter's profile;
- Peter's employer, tasked with writing his annual appraisal.

In each case ask the respective group(s) to think what they might say, write or do in regard to Peter. (See *separate instruction sheets*). The point here is to gain as full a picture as possible, using our imagination to inform the biblical record and vice versa. Please do not dismiss the scenarios as too unlikely to be worth considering. For example, the dating agency: it should be noted that arranged marriages were very much part of that culture. The careers advisor scenario could be a modern take on the wishes of any parent to see their son become the main breadwinner. But equally we face situations like this in the modern world. How does our understanding of discipleship, through considering Peter's life, inform how we would act?

Stage 5: Ask for *brief* feedback after exercise if time allows (otherwise you may leave this out).

Stage 6: Reflection on the life of Peter

*The following information may help you when reflecting together on the life of Peter and its implications for your group. However, avoid the temptation to make this stage into a lecture. The idea is to read this information in advance and see how it helps you to shape the reflective discussion that takes place with your group.*

As soon as we look beyond the gospels a very different picture begins to emerge; cf Acts 1:15ff (where Peter speaks authoritatively to the early believers about someone to take the

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place of Judas) and Acts 2:14-42 (Pentecost sermon and 3000 converts). What to participants think brought about such a dramatic transformation?

Earlier mentioned there are about 170 refs to Peter in NT. John 21 is almost midway (John 21:2 being the 85<sup>th</sup> ref) – without reading too much into things, almost as though this chapter represents a real turning point ... or not so much a turning point as a threshold or doorway. It is as though John 21 is like a door which Peter has to go through in order to enter into a new life of discipleship, one characterised by:

- faith – where previously there had tended to be mainly doubt);
- trust in God – where previously Peter had tended to trust in his own strength);
- a belief in the power of God to work through him – where previously he had threatened to become overwhelmed by a crushing sense of his own sin and failure.

We all need these kinds of experiences.

But here we often hesitate, either because we think we're not good enough or because we fear the changes that may be involved. As far as the first point is concerned – it's hard to imagine feeling worse than Peter. As for the second point (fearing changes) – it's worth noting that many of Peter's qualities weren't so much changed as subtly reshaped and moulded to the purposes of God. So it was with Peter –

- his bravado, which previously often caused him to speak out of turn, now transformed into an authoritative leadership vital for the early church;
- his boldness, which previously led him into situations where angels might fear to tread, now transformed into an altogether different kind of boldness enabling him to witness for the Lord even in the face of strident opposition;
- his brashness, which previously led him sometimes to do things which were unwise or ill considered (eg lopping off the servant's ear!), now transformed into a courage and determination to so live for the gospel that he would not be deflected.

BUT ... none of this could have happened without God's intervention. And, by way of ending this exploration of Peter's life, consider briefly reading from earlier; ie 1 Peter 3:8-18. Note certain key qualities advocated by Peter; thus, (v8) love, tenderness and humility, (v9) blessing instead of abusing those who hurt us; (v14) call not to be afraid or intimidated; (v16) call to show gentleness and reverence – what startling contrasts with the Peter of the gospels! What really strikes me though in this whole passage is v15b:

*"Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" ... (v16) ... "yet do it with gentleness and reverence."*

The one who ran away, who couldn't even face the inquisitive challenges of a young servant girl, who wanted to use the sword in defence of Jesus and himself – that same man has been completely turned around. The difference of course came at Pentecost when the promise of being clothed with God's power was suddenly and gloriously fulfilled. Peter might have resisted, especially given his previous track record, but he had learned that his resources were no longer enough. He needed to be resourced by God – in all sorts of ways – but supremely by the power of the Spirit.

And so it is still for us. Like Peter we are disciples of Jesus, but equally like Peter it is too easy to lose our way until we reach that point of wondering what on earth it's all about. It is precisely at this point that Jesus comes to us, picks us up, breathes on us the renewing

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gift of the Spirit and sends us on our way again, but this time with new purpose and vigour.

How can we ensure that we don't miss out on this resourcing, so vital if we are going to continue as true disciples of Christ? Pray to receive the gift of the Spirit is the first, important step, but beyond that there are all sorts of things we can do to go on equipping and resourcing ourselves. Consider carefully your next step in following this up.

### Prayer

Living Lord,

Help us to discover your message to us in the bible and through our discussions

As we commit ourselves once again to live as your disciples in the world

Through the power of your Holy Spirit.

Amen.

### EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

### THE NEXT STEP

You might want to do a similar thing yourselves with other disciples mentioned in the gospel accounts.

More materials for Evangelism Year are on the website

### Acknowledgements

This material was produced by Revd Dr James Coleman of Yorkshire Synod, who has given permission for it to be used by Vision4life.

### HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group and the coordinator about general issues via the website or at [admin@vision4life.org.uk](mailto:admin@vision4life.org.uk)

Website issues can be dealt with through [web@vision4life.org.uk](mailto:web@vision4life.org.uk)

Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: [evangelism@vision4life.org.uk](mailto:evangelism@vision4life.org.uk)