

FIRST BAPTIST **ROGERS**

valiantwarrior

SEMESTER ELEVEN

FLAWED, FAITHFUL, AND FRUITFUL: A STUDY OF SIMON PETER

introduction

TO VALIANT WARRIORS

In the Old Testament, certain groups of men were noted as “valiant warriors” or “men of valor.” These men displayed courage and determination in battle. King David had his “mighty men.” These men proved themselves to be trustworthy in battlefield situations. These brave warriors were not limited to one tribe or people group. They were only limited by their courage and determination.

Valiant means possessing or showing courage or determination. Obviously, a warrior is one who is engaged in a war. A war has been underway since the Garden of Eden. The kingdom of God has been under assault by the kingdom of darkness. Satan’s temptation to Adam and Eve that led to their sin resulting in the Fall of all mankind was the declaration of war against God’s kingdom.

Biblical manhood and masculinity was also attacked in the garden on that day. Adam had been created first, given dominion over the earth and even named his wife. Satan did not initially go to Adam but to his wife, Eve with the temptation. It is understood that Adam was most certainly right there while his wife was being tempted. Adam abdicated his leadership responsibility in protecting his wife. He then followed her into the same sin that she had committed. Since then, God’s people have battled against the kingdom of sin and darkness. But also, men have battled for biblical manhood and masculinity.

Men are at their best when they are valiant warriors, battling for the kingdom of God and rescuing the disadvantaged in the name of the King. Robert Lewis subtitled “Men’s Fraternity,” A Quest for Authentic Manhood. Valiant Warriors hopes to be another leg in the race or step in the journey in this quest. David challenged his son, Solomon in 2 Kings 2:2-4, “I am going the way of



all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man. Keep the charge of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the Law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn, so that the LORD may carry out His promise which He spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons are careful of their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’”

We hope to show men how to be men, valiant warriors through this study. We believe that the key to men being transformed is first by the Word of God. Another key is men in small groups for discussion, prayer, accountability and encouragement. As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. It is out of that desire and vision that we have embraced the following guidestones.

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Valiant Warrior Mission

To disciple men to follow Christ and to live and lead in their homes, churches, and communities for God’s glory.

Valiant Warrior Vision

To see an army of men devoted to Christ leading their families and this church to serve Christ and bring Him glory until Jesus returns.

Valiant Warrior Strategy

To disciple men in small groups to lead their families and their church to serve Christ and bring Him glory until Jesus returns.

Valiant Warrior Promise

Judges 6:12 “The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.”

Valiant Warrior Code of Honor

To grow in Christlikeness personally. To be committed to my family and Christ’s church. To intentionally encourage other men in Christlikeness and commitment to the church.

Valiant Warrior Scripture References

2 Chronicles 14:8 "Now Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah, bearing large shields and spears, and 280,000 from Benjamin, bearing shields and wielding bows; all of them were valiant warriors."

Deuteronomy 3:18 "Then I commanded you at that time, saying, 'The Lord your God has given you this land to possess it; all you valiant men shall cross over armed before your brothers, the sons of Israel.'"

Joshua 1:14 "Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle shall remain in the land which Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but you shall cross before your brothers in battle array, all your valiant warriors, and shall help them."

Joshua 8:3 "So Joshua rose with all the people of war to go up to Ai; and Joshua chose 30,000 men, valiant warriors, and sent them out at night."

Joshua 10:7 "So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him and all the valiant warriors."

Judges 6:12 "The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, 'The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior.'"

Judges 11:1 "Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior..."

Judges 18:2 "So the sons of Dan sent from their family five men out of their whole number, valiant men from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to search it;"

1 Samuel 10:26 "Saul also went to his house at Gibeah; and the valiant men whose hearts God had touched went with him."

1 Samuel 14:52 "Now the war against the Philistines was severe all the days of Saul; and when Saul saw any mighty man or any valiant man, he attached him to his staff."

1 Samuel 18:17 "Then Saul said to David, 'Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife, only be a valiant man for me and fight the Lord's battles.'"

1 Samuel 31:12 "All the valiant men rose and walked all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh and burned them there."

2 Samuel 2:7 "Now therefore, let your hands be strong and be valiant; for Saul your lord is dead, and also the house of Judah has anointed me king over them."

2 Samuel 17:10 "And even the one who is valiant, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will completely lose heart; for all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man and those who are with him are valiant men."

1 Chronicles 28:1 "Now David assembled at Jerusalem all the officials of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the commanders of the divisions that served the king, and the commanders of thousands, and the commanders of hundreds, and the overseers of all the property and livestock belonging to the king and his sons, with the officials and the mighty men, even all the valiant men."

2 Chronicles 13:3 "Abijah began the battle with an army of valiant warriors, 400,000 chosen men, while Jeroboam drew up in battle formation against him with 800,000 chosen men who were valiant warriors."

VALIANT WARRIOR

SEMESTER 11: FLAWED, FAITHFUL, AND FRUITFUL: A STUDY OF SIMON PETER

This semester of Valiant Warrior brings us to the New Testament. All our previous character studies have been from the Old Testament. Our subject during this six-week study is none other than Simon Peter. He proves to be an interesting character. Simon was a common name. Two of the twelve disciples carried the name Simon. Simon Peter is distinguished from Simon the Zealot. Simon Peter is also known as Simon bar Jonah or Simon, son of Jonah (John or Jonas). Jesus called Simon the rock, petras. It is Peter or Cephas in Aramaic. He is called Simon, Peter, Simon Peter, and Cephas in Scripture.

Simon Peter was one of the twelve disciples or apostles. This position gives him a unique position in redemption history. Despite what some misguided, at the least, and heretical teachers, at the worst, might contend, there were only a select few of the apostles. Apostles were chosen by God specifically. They were eyewitnesses of Jesus and His resurrection. Jesus chose twelve men to fulfill this role of disciple/apostle. Judas betrayed Jesus and was lost. Matthias was selected to replace Judas (Acts 1:26). Paul was also called an apostle repeatedly in Scripture. In my opinion, these were the only apostles in the official sense.

Simon Peter was considered the leader of the apostles. The New Testament mentions the disciples in three groups of four. The first group is always Peter, James, John, and Andrew. Peter is always mentioned first in this group. These were the first disciples called by Jesus. Brothers, James and John, along with Peter were closest to Jesus, but Peter was considered their leader and the leader of the twelve. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts list the twelve disciples. In each list, Peter is listed first. In each list, Peter is mentioned with James, John, and Peter's brother, Andrew.

Peter was not only the leader of the apostles, but he was well-known for his zeal and confidence. His zeal and confidence were often offset by his misspeak and emotional overreactions. His flaws stand out. Jesus would say to him on one occasion, "Get behind Me, Satan." As most know, Peter would deny Jesus three times on one night. Peter represents a lot of us.

Peter wanted to follow Christ and was passionate about following Jesus most of the time. His zeal would often get him in trouble as he would over promise and under deliver, like we sometimes do. Peter had his moments, like when he gave the confession Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God. Only later to allow his zeal to misunderstand Jesus' purpose of coming to die for sin. Obviously, Peter's denial of Christ on the eve of His crucifixion was the low point of Peter's life. Many would think this was an unrecoverable offense. It was unrecoverable from a human perspective. Only Jesus could initiate a restoration, which He did.

Peter was a great leader. He made frequent mistakes of a young leader pre-crucifixion. But he also possessed some great leadership qualities that would be shaped through time and experience to make him a great and fruitful leader post-Pentecost. His three years of following Jesus up close refined and developed him into one of the greatest leaders the Church ever had. Peter was clearly the one who took the baton of the faith from Jesus and led decisively up through the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Paul was not saved until Acts 9 and did not go on the first missionary journey until Acts 13. In Acts 15, at the Jerusalem Council, it was Peter who carried the day in clarifying the gospel expectation and church planting standards Paul had presented. So, it was not really until Paul and Silas left on the second missionary journey (Acts 16) that the torch of leadership moved from Peter to Paul. Peter's influence would continue in his epistles, 1 and 2 Peter.

Discuss what you know about Simon Peter. What do you like about him? Where do you find fault in him?

What would you like to learn from studying about Simon Peter?

week one
FISHERMAN'S CALL

Peter and Andrew were in the family fishing business. Fishing was hard but honorable work. It was for rugged men who could endure the elements of weather. Their hands were calloused from the pull of the nets and fish. Their skin was sun baked and leathered. They often net fished at night while most people were sleeping. If you have fished all day or all night in the heat, then you are familiar with the smell associated with human sweat and B.O. combined with the smell of the fish being handled throughout the day and night. The slime and the sweat mixing only to dry on the side of the boat, the clothes of the fisherman, the hands of the fisherman, and on anything touched including the brow and the face.

I had the opportunity to travel in Northern India to Dharmsala in the Himachal Pradesh state. One of our IMB missionaries had located an UUPG in a remote area about a year earlier. They were fisherman. It had been a year since his initial contact with this particular family. They were far away from others and isolated in their location. The multitude of UUPGs unfortunately outnumbers the missionaries and national partners. So, over a year later, Lisa and I accompanied our IMB missionary for his second visit to this family.

One of the men permitted us to take a photo of his hand. His fingers were extremely enlarged around his fingernails. We believe this was caused by great amounts of time having his hands in the water and pulling up nets. You can imagine having your hands underwater, unprotected for hours of the day and much of that time holding onto and pulling up a net that is hopefully full of fish.

It was rugged man's profession. Fishermen worked hard in order to survive to feed their family.

It was in this fisherman context Peter first met Jesus. Some (F. B. Meyer) have suggested Peter was a John the Baptist convert. He most likely heard and saw John the Baptist and his preaching. We do know Peter's brother Andrew was one of John the Baptist's disciples who heard John declare "Behold, the Lamb of God" (John 1:35). So, it is not unreasonable to think Peter was influenced in some significant ways by the ministry and preaching of John the Baptist.

Peter is mentioned more than any other disciple. He is mentioned more than any person in the New Testament, except for Jesus. So, let us begin our biblical journey into this fisherman who became the leader of the disciples.

Matthew 4:18-20

*Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, **Simon who was called Peter**, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.*

Mark 1:16-18

*As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw **Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon**, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.*

Luke 5:1-11

Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. And He got into one of the boats, which was **Simon's**, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat. When He had finished speaking, **He said to Simon**, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; **and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon**. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men." When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

John 1:40-42

One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was **Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found first his own brother Simon** and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. **Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).**"

Fishermen were hard-working, honorable, tough, rugged, hands-on, and engaged in dirty (smelly fish) and necessary work. Peter was a man of the water. He lived much of his life on the water and made his living out of the water. He is called Simon bar Jonah which means the son of Jonah. These Hebrews were well-acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures speaking of Jonah and the great fish.

His profession caused him to be a real man.

He was in the family business. He was in business with his brother Andrew and evidently also in business with James and John (Luke 5:10). Andrew met Jesus first and brought his brother, Simon, to Jesus. I have been a part of two Billy Graham Crusades where Billy Graham was the preacher. In each of those crusades, a key element to the success of the crusade was what they called "Operation Andrew." This was basically writing the names of three to five people on a card that you committed to pray for and would invite to the crusade. Like Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus, we were committing to bringing our friends to Jesus.

It was obvious Andrew had a significant impact on Simon Peter. They shared the family business of fishing for fish. Andrew introduced Simon Peter to a new family business of fishing for men. Andrew actually introduced him to Jesus, who introduced him to a new family and new family business.

Much of Peter's life was lived on a particular body of water, the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is actually a freshwater lake. If you have been to Israel, I am sure you have visited the Sea of Galilee. This lake is the lowest freshwater lake on earth and the second lowest next to the Dead Sea. One of the highlights of the trip to the Holy Land is typically a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. It brings to life many of the biblical stories in the New Testament. The area around the Sea of Galilee is largely undeveloped even to this day. Tiberias has some hotels and some population, but around the Sea of Galilee is mostly like it was in Jesus' day.

It is easy to see how an unforeseen storm could suddenly arise on this lake in a moment's notice. You can see the white capping of the waves that could produce life-threatening situations on the water. That is typically one of the challenges of the Holy Land tour, finding a time when the water is calm enough to make the trip out on a boat.

On the north shore, a fishing village called Capernaum served as the hometown for Simon Peter and the home base for much of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee. It was in Capernaum that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. Peter evidently relocated from the east side of the lake to the hometown of his wife. So, we know Peter was married. Today, there are significant ruins along this northern shore that could possibly be Peter's home and a church from the first century. Peter never wandered far from home, probably just a few days walking around Israel. He was the apostle to the Jews. His ministry would be to establish the church in Jerusalem and surrounding areas.

Peter was a commercial fisherman. His method of fishing was a net. It was out of this family business that Jesus stepped into Peter's life. In the same way today, Jesus steps into the lives of men wherever He finds them. Some may be fisherman. Some may be hunters. Some may be mechanics. Some may be truck drivers. Some may be farmers. Some may be plumbers, electricians, doctors, lawyers, teachers, accountants, loggers, IT specialists, and the list goes on and on.

Jesus related a familiar and common activity or job to life's most important task. Jesus would later tell His disciples to go and make disciples of all the nations. This is the beginning of the Great Commission call. Jesus did not start with the nations in calling Peter, but He certainly had the nations in mind. He started with where Peter was and called him at that place.

While what Peter did was important, what Peter was called to do would be more important. Where Peter had been was important, but where Peter was going was more important. Who Peter knew in the past was important, but Who Peter knew now was more important.

The same is true for you. Jesus wants to step into your life today and lead you in the direction that will give meaning and significance to your life. Jesus told Peter you have been fishing for fish. And as great as that is, fishing for men will be even greater.

I like to catch fish or have a successful hunt. But what Jesus invites us to do is more important, more challenging, and more fun than even catching fish. It is amazing to me some people do not like fishing. Many have never been fishing, so they do not know what they are missing. Others have never caught fish. I agree catching fish is more fun than fishing. If you never catch anything, then you might as well be doing something else. But the possibility of catching a fish keeps the fisherman going. Also, like other recreational and work activities, we do those with other people. This is especially illustrated with net fishing. It is not a one man's sport. It is a team sport.

Fishing for men is a team sport. Our community of Valiant Warriors is a brotherhood that agrees God has called us to join Him and other brothers in reaching lost men for the sake of the gospel. This is what Jesus is doing when He calls Peter.

Someone (Andrew) brought Simon Peter to Jesus. Our first questions are:

Who was instrumental in bringing you to Jesus Christ? Sharing the gospel with you? Bringing you to church? Initiating introducing you to Jesus?

How has that impacted you in sharing Christ with other people?

Who are you bringing to Jesus these days?

Jesus called Peter specifically and personally. Discuss how God has called you first to salvation. Then discuss how Jesus has called you to be a fisher of men (partner in the Great Commission).

Discuss some lessons you have learned from fishing that apply to reaching men with the gospel.

Some people like to fish. More people like to catch fish. As we study Peter's life, we will see there were times when Peter was not catching fish. We also see some occasions when Jesus directed Peter to go catch fish and he did.

You can only catch fish where there are fish. You are most likely to catch fish where there are more fish or a lot of fish. Many times, fish hang out together in schools of fish. Sometimes you will catch a lot of fish in a particular place disproportionately than another place where you did not catch any fish. Some days you catch a lot of fish. Some days you do not catch any fish. Some people say you need to fish when and where the fish are biting.

Some remote lakes that are hard to get to have a lot of fish to catch if someone would go and fish in that remote lake. Our friend Joey and his son, Jason, fished in the boundary waters on the border of Canada. My friend Paul and his family have done this for years. The lakes are isolated and remote. The only way to get to these lakes is by planes that land on the water. Some other lakes are only accessible by hiking to them carrying all your gear, including your canoe. Because of the difficulty of accessing these lakes, very few people go and fish there. But the adventurers who do go catch a lot of fish. If you like to catch fish and a challenge, then this is it!

I am sure you know where this is going. There are many areas in our nation and world that have multitudes of people who have never been reached. Some of these areas have people who would respond to the gospel if someone would just go and fish in that lake.

Peter was called to fish for men. It would lead him to leave his livelihood and job of fishing out of Capernaum as homebase. He would travel (not really far from home by today's standards) to follow Jesus and be mentored by Jesus. Peter was under Jesus' internship for three years learning and observing and doing ministry alongside Jesus. Peter's future ministry was a ministry to the Jewish people. He would travel to Joppa and Caesarea and serve the church in Jerusalem.

We will also see over and over again Peter was a flawed fisher of men. Peter's well-documented failures will serve as an example of hope for all of us flawed disciples. Peter learned some hard lessons along the way.

Discuss and contrast how Peter's failures should encourage us to keep moving forward despite our failures as opposed to giving up and quitting on ourselves and God's mission.

Discuss the importance of fishing where there are fish and when the fish are biting. Discuss the importance of continuing to fish until you find the fish or until they start biting. Make the connection with fishing for men.

Sometimes God calls certain men to follow Him into vocational ministry to provide ministry leadership in order to make more disciples. Peter would enlist in a three-year residency program under the direct tutelage of Jesus in preparation for leading the movement in its early days of expansion. This is no different than going to college, then medical school, then residency before being fully on your own in the medical profession. A commitment to becoming a fisher of men is a commitment to training and discipleship. We need more Valiant Warriors to be trainers and mentors along with more Valiant Warriors to join the residency program.

Peter maintained some connection with the fishing business since we find him fishing again after Jesus has been raised from the dead.

When Peter left the nets to follow Jesus, we understand where Peter went was always within a few days walking distance from Capernaum. In today's world with jet airplanes, we are just a few days away from any place in the world. God is still calling men to be pastors and missionaries and that will require leaving where you are to go where God calls. God is also calling people to be engaged in the Great Commission in and around their current locations.

I believe until God says to go, then we should stay where God has put us. But when God says to go, then we must go. I heard Adrian Rogers once say, "Plan on staying your entire life, but be prepared to leave in 10 minutes." The call of God to Peter appears to be immediate. Jesus said, "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." The Bible says they immediately left their nets and followed Him.

I have often taught when Jesus says "Follow Me" He is on the move. So, we have to be on the move to follow Him. Jesus is not standing still saying come and stand by Me. But on the other hand, in some places in Scripture we are admonished to watch and pray and wait on the Lord. Jesus told the disciples to go to the upper room and wait on the Holy Spirit to come. Responding immediately when we have a clear word and waiting until we have a clear word are both biblical responses to the call of God.

I know for me, a vocational call to ministry leadership was a process over time. I was serving in responsible ministry as a layman in our church and as a volunteer in prison ministry. These ministry opportunities helped to sharpen my skills as a speaker and teacher and my knowledge as a Bible student. It also helped give me practical experience in personal evangelism and dealing with a variety of people and situations. It was also a time when my passion for ministry did not wane, nor did I grow weary of ministry. Just the opposite was happening. I was gaining more passion, confidence, and biblical independence. I did not need to be propped up or supported by outsiders for me to do what I was called to do. My prison ministry involvement was completely independent of my home church. My love and commitment to my home church did not wane in any way. There were circumstances that occurred at my home church that could have been discouraging to Lisa and me. I have seen many people leave churches for a lot less than we experienced. It was decades ago, or I probably would not use myself as an example. But I do know what it is like to overcome discouragement and less than ideal circumstances. You do not have to be a superstar, because I know I am not. You do have to trust in and follow Christ no matter what.

There is always noise and discouragement out there. But if Jesus is your passion, then ministry with Him and for Him will also be your passion. It was my passion wherever I went. It was a calling I could not escape. It followed me around. It was constantly on my mind. It was always there, but the clarity was not there yet until it finally came. I knew. I stepped out in faith when the clarity came.

It was not logical, but it was reasonable to me. It was supported by some people and questioned by others.

God did not waste any of my experiences at work and volunteer ministry in preparing me for what has been over three decades of vocational ministry leadership. At the right time, His time, God clarified my next steps of faith and preparation. God called me to take a step of faith. I needed to personally trust Him if I was going to be teaching others to trust Him. My job was a lot of security for me. I loved my job. As many know, I was a Civil Engineer. Most engineers letting others know they are engineers has been my observation through the years. It was probably the biggest faith step I could take at that time. God called me to leave a job I loved. It was a job that provided security in finances for our family. The job also provided a sense of self-worth and importance to me. I did not grow up with great accolades and recognitions. I always felt I worked hard in school and at work to achieve where I was. I never felt like I was given anything. I felt I had to earn everything as far as academics and career goes. God was asking me to walk away from what I had worked for and earned to follow Him. It was hard on one hand, but it was easy on the other hand (Philippians 3:1-14).

It was hard also because we loved our church and our friends. That is a whole different story. But sometimes when we follow God, we must leave friends, family, familiarity, and comfort in exchange for the unknown. That is faith. God is pleased with faith.

It is easy to look back now and see how God blessed that decision. That view and perspective was not nearly as clear the first months and years of that faith step. Serving a church with less than 70 people attending most every Sunday for three years and then going to a church averaging 75 in attendance did not have the accolades of instant success in ways the world measures success. I will say Lisa and I were content and developed some great friendships in those early days of vocational ministry. That is enough about my story. I hope it helps some of you who may be considering vocational ministry leadership. Trust the Lord to make His will known. Be faithful. Be obedient. Be fruitful where you are. That is the best place to be to hear God's call to join Him in ministry.

Discuss what a call to vocational ministry leadership looks like for some people (maybe you). Consider what preparation (Peter's, Wes', and yours) looks like.

Discuss some of the challenges of following God into vocational ministry and missions.

Discuss ways you can be engaged in global missions from Northwest Arkansas. This includes your business and travel and internet and Teams/Zoom Meetings and technology.

week two
FAITHFUL FOLLOWER

This lesson will focus on some key experiences Peter had with Jesus. Certainly, the calling of Peter by Jesus was the inaugural and key experience Peter had with Jesus, but it was not his only connection with Jesus.

One way to validate the call of Jesus on our life is that it is not the last time Jesus touches our life and heart. Throughout our Valiant Warrior study of Peter, we need to be looking for leadership lessons from the life of Peter. Remember Peter was the clear leader of the disciples. So, every time you see a reference made to the disciples, then you should keep in mind Peter was front and center in those situations.

Jesus did not just want to enlist Peter to lead a group of men to do His work while Jesus moved on to more important or different work. Jesus enlisted Peter to share the work with Him. Peter was the leader of the disciples, but he was not *the* leader. Jesus was the clear leader. It would not be until Jesus ascended that Peter would actually be the primary leader of the disciples. Jesus was training Peter to become the leader when He left.

This lesson will focus primarily on the experiences Peter shared with the other disciples and with Jesus. While Peter was mentioned more than any of the other disciples by name, many times he was not mentioned by name but was present and included in the reference "disciples." Peter had a shared experience with the other disciples. This shared experience impacted him uniquely.

I hope to show you how the shared experience with other men contributes to you becoming the man God intended you to be. The fact Jesus spent more time with groups of men than he did alone with a particular man communicates the importance of a community of men.

It is also notable some men can have the same experience and hear the same thing and see the same thing, but it impacts different men differently. Our next lesson will deal with some unique experiences Peter had that all the other disciples did not necessarily experience. So, Peter was impacted by the common experiences he shared with his disciple brothers, and he was also impacted by the unique experiences he had with Jesus.

It is notable that in these passages Simon Peter did not stand out nor was he highlighted. So much of life is not about us being the center of attention. We have experiences that are shared with others that can have a significant impact on us personally, but also, these shared experiences can knit our hearts together, especially with other Valiant Warriors.

After calling them to follow Him, Jesus quickly gathered His disciples and began teaching them what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount.

When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying...

Jesus sat down in a relaxed and deliberate manner, one that you would expect from a wise teacher. His first audience is His disciples and there was also a crowd gathered there. Jesus' teaching was for Simon Peter, although not mentioned here. His teaching was for His disciples. His teaching is for everyone. Jesus then spoke the beatitudes. This teaching is a series of statements that begin with the word "Blessed." These statements address the character of a man. In Valiant Warrior semester 10, "The Man God Blesses," we discussed these beatitudes. These are the summary statements associated with each beatitude.

God blesses the humble.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:3

God blesses those who mourn.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4

God blesses the meek.

"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5

God blesses the passionate for Him.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Matthew 5:6

God blesses the merciful.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Matthew 5:7

God blesses the pure in heart.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Matthew 5:8

God blesses the peacemakers.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Matthew 5:9

God blesses the persecuted.

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:10

Peter heard this teaching of Jesus. **As you consider this initial teaching of Jesus, what areas above do you think Peter needed a lot of work in?**

In this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples that His way was a higher and better way. It was more than just outward behavior. The heart attitude was most important. Jesus also warned His disciples it is a narrow way to follow Him (Matthew 7:13-14). He taught them you know a tree by its fruit. He also warned not everyone who says they are a follower of Jesus really is (Matthew 7:21-23). He told the story of two foundations. Storms are surely to come, but the house built upon a strong foundation will withstand the storms.

What teaching from the Sermon on the Mount challenges you and other Valiant Warriors?

Discuss how the Sermon on the Mount presents the case of salvation by grace and sanctification by grace.

Peter not only heard the great teaching of Jesus, but he also experienced the miracle-working power of Jesus. In Matthew 8, Peter's mother-in-law was healed.

Matthew 8:14-17

When Jesus came into Peter's home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she got up and waited on Him. When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases."

The miracle power of Jesus was experienced personally for Peter. He was not only a witness to His miracles, but his own family also experienced His miracle power. This story lets us know Peter was married. We also see many others came to Jesus for healing. Remember, Peter lived in Capernaum and this was the headquarters of Jesus' ministry in Galilee.

Discuss the importance of personally receiving the healing power of Jesus in your life as compared to seeing the healing power of Jesus in the lives of others. Do not let "healing" be restricted to physical healing.

Peter saw Jesus perform numerous miracles. He cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34).

When He came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. They were so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way. And they cried out, saying, "What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" Now there was a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them. The demons began to entreat Him, saying, "If You are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine." And He said to them, "Go!" And they came out and went into the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters. The herdsmen ran away, and went to the city and reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region.

Discuss what Peter learned from seeing Jesus cast out demons from these demon-possessed men.

This story is frequently used in gospel presentations before handing out compassion kits or storying among UUPGs. Why do you think missionaries and mission organizations include this as a primary story in sharing the gospel among the unreached?

Peter saw Jesus heal a paralytic man (Mark 2:1-13).

When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'? "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home." And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this." And He went out again by the seashore; and all the people were coming to Him, and He was teaching them.

This is one of my favorite stories of friends bringing their friend to Jesus. This story is a great illustration to be used in personal evangelism. The initiative of the four men bringing the paralytic challenges all Valiant Warriors to be engaged in bringing people to Jesus.

Another important lesson is the faith of the friends is recognized by Jesus and rewarded by Jesus. It was their faith Jesus responded to, not the faith of the paralytic initially.

Another important lesson Simon Peter learned was the authority of Jesus. Jesus had authority to forgive sins. Jesus had the authority to say rise and walk. He then asked the question, "Which is harder?" He knew the speculation of His critics.

I have always loved the way this paragraph ended: "...so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this.' And He went out again by the seashore; and all the people were coming to Him, and He was teaching them." Mark 2:12-13

"Amazed and glorifying God" is always the goal. We get to be amazed at Him, and He gets the glory.

What are some key lessons Peter observed from this miracle of physical and spiritual healing? Teamwork? Hard work? Concern for others? Risk? Jesus' authority?

Peter saw the compassion of Jesus and heard the compelling call to pray for the harvest (Matthew 9:35-38).

Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

This experience for Peter and the others should have shown them the emotional heart of Jesus for hurting people. It also emphasizes the priority of the ministry in "proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom." Jesus saw the people. He did not look past them on His way to the cross. He was going to the cross for them. What He saw caused Him to have deep emotion for them. It was a gut-wrenching feeling. He was also perceptive beyond just feeling for them. He saw they were distressed and dispirited. They were fearful and depressed. They were anxious and had given up. The reason was because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus certainly is the Good Shepherd who came to save His sheep and keep them. But God has also called pastors to serve as shepherds. I believe husbands and fathers are to shepherd their homes. I believe LIFE group leaders shepherd their LIFE group. I believe our deacons share shepherding responsibilities with the pastors.

So many churches view their deacon body as an organizational, authoritarian group to make decisions and keep the pastor and staff in line. In reality, deacons are the servants who meet the needs of the congregation so the pastors can provide spiritual leadership through ministry of the Word of God and prayer. I really do not think God is looking for better leaders. He is looking for faithful servants.

Jesus said His children needed a shepherd. Is it any wonder that Jesus told Peter to "Feed My sheep" three times after Peter said he loved Jesus? Peter saw the raw emotion and the insightful assessment of the dispirited and distressed sheep. Shepherd the flock.

Jesus turned to prayer. In all His assessment of the situation, the solution was to pray and ask the Lord to send forth laborers into the harvest field. We are back again at fishing for men. Involving more people in the fishing for men task and assignment. Valiant Warriors are called to be fishers of men. We talk about courage and character for Valiant Warriors. The calling of the Valiant Warrior is to reach other men and share community with them so other men can join in their hopeful, life-giving community. Our Valiant Warrior groups must be open enough that complete strangers can come and feel and be welcomed in.

First, they must feel welcome. The feeling part is on the new person. It is the responsibility of those already there to create that feeling of being welcomed. Some guys are so focused on themselves and their close friends they are oblivious to the awkwardness and crying out of others who have no connections. Sometimes our close-knit friendships come across to others on the outside of that friendship as a discouragement or impossibility for them to break into that close-knit group. Close-knit groups are great. Let me ask you this. What does your close-knit group do together that serves others who are not in your group economically, socially, or culturally? Close-knit groups that go to the Amazon, India, Cambodia, Vietnam, etc. are typically more in line with the community Jesus advocates.

Second, they must be welcomed. Welcome is not when the guest takes the initiative to come and you just say "welcome." Think about it. The guest found the church, drove to the church, walked into the church, walked into your LIFE group or your Valiant Warrior group. They have taken so much more initiative in some cases. The better story is when the Valiant Warrior has befriended someone outside the church. They have had lunch or coffee or breakfast before ever coming to church. They are then invited to church and lunch afterward. They are never alone for one minute the entire time they are at church the first time. Then at the follow up coffee, the Valiant Warrior asks the guest, "How did you like church?" He communicates, "Man we really liked having you in our LIFE group. I hope you will come back again next week. There are some other people who would like to meet you and maybe grab lunch with us."

Pray to the Lord of the Harvest to send forth laborers. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. It is not that there are no fish to be caught. There just are not enough fishermen.

Discuss the activities Peter saw Jesus doing.

Discuss the compassion and reasons for Jesus' feelings towards the people.

Discuss the solution to the plight of these distressed and dispirited people.

What should be the activity and emotion of the Valiant Warrior in response to the troubled lives of those around us?

Jesus sends Peter and the disciples out on mission (Matthew 10:1-23).

Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him. These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support. And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city. As you enter the house, give it your greeting. If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace. Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city. Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes."

Jesus sent His disciples out after "instructing them." It is important to understand the end goal is not instruction, but it is sending them out. Many Valiant Warriors live most, if not all, their life in the instructing stage. In a way, if you never get out of the instruction stage then you probably are not a Valiant Warrior. What made those Old Testament men earn the title of Valiant Warrior and Might Men was what they did, not what they learned. Learning and instruction is great. But if a man stays in medical school training for 30 years and never serves helping sick people get well, then he is no doctor.

Jesus gave them specific instructions as to what to do and not do. Our study does not permit the time to do a deep dive into this passage. But it is certainly worthy of personal study or an outside Valiant Warrior session intensive study. Jesus gave instruction on entering houses and not expecting pay and trusting God for all your needs. He warned about being wise and shrewd and also gentle. Expect to be persecuted.

What are some lessons about the mission Peter heard from Jesus? What are some lessons that apply to you being on mission with Jesus today?

Jesus explained the high cost of discipleship (Luke 9:23-26).

And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.'

These are a power-packed few verses Peter heard. These are the key verses of the Disciple's Cross found in Avery Willis' MasterLife Discipleship Study. Avery wrote this material for missionaries. Lisa and I took this course almost 40 years ago and have taught it to multiple groups through the years. It all centers around Luke 9:23. Consider the discussion below.

Discuss the three things required to follow Jesus from 9:23.

Discuss the paradox of saving and losing your life for the sake of Christ.

Discuss gaining the world and losing your soul.

Discuss the problem of being ashamed of Christ (Peter's future denial and Romans 1:16).

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FOUNDATIONAL FRIEND

Peter continued to see the miraculous hand of Jesus. One of the miracles recorded in all four gospels is the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus' popularity as a teacher and healer grew and so did the crowds. On this particular day, a large crowd gathered and the people were being healed by Jesus. Jesus provided healing to the sick and food for the hungry.

John 6:1-15

After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?" This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. When they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost." So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

Remember the purpose of the book of John.

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. John 20:30-31

Peter was an eyewitness to this miracle along with the others. The greatest thing about this story is the faith it produces. That faith was directed towards Jesus. Peter's faith, along with the other disciples', grew through this miracle.

Discuss the purpose of John's Gospel and the purpose of all the miracles Jesus performed.

No problem is too big when you know where to turn.

Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?" This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little."

Philip is mentioned here, but Peter must be right there in the middle of this dilemma.

Jesus lifted His eyes and saw the large crowd coming to Him.

Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him...5

Jesus was aware of the people. He saw the people coming to Him. He was looking and He saw. As in Matthew 9:35-38, Jesus sees the people. This is a lesson Peter would have to learn. Are you looking? Do you see? Yourself, your family, how about others? Many are not even aware of how closed off they are to others.

Jesus tested Philip concerning the needs of others along with all the disciples who were there with him.

...said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?" This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. 6

Jesus did not ask to multiply food but rather to multiply Philip's faith.

God does not need us to help Him. He allows us to be involved in what He is doing. Jesus was about to do a miracle, and He was inviting His disciples, Philip particularly, to join Him.

Jesus made it clear He cared about these people eating.

He proposed consideration of a human solution, "Where are we to buy bread?"

He proposed consideration of a human need, "So that these may eat."

Jesus cares for you, but not only you and your family.

Jesus knew what He was going to do. 6

Jesus does not ask questions because He does not know the answers. He asks questions to bring people along to discover His will and way. Philip and Andrew were about to discover what Jesus already knew He was going to do.

Jesus wanted to involve Philip in what He was about to do.

Jesus can do it without us, but He wants to involve us.

Philip answers the question with a business, financial answer.

Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." 7

He also answered with what we do not have instead of answering how can we feed these people. Everyone can tell you why you cannot do something. It would take eight months' wages to provide a little for everyone. Philip's resources were too small.

There was also the reality that missing a meal would not have been the end of the world. Most likely in that life circumstance, people often missed a meal here and there. **What was in view here was the will of God and the plan of God. It was the message of the miracle as much as the miracle.** We have learned from our study of John's gospel and the miracles of Jesus the message behind the miracle is more important than even the miracle.

If Philip had faith, he would have said, "You are greater than Moses and the people were fed with manna." He would have said, "Man does not live by bread alone." But instead, he said why it could not be done and then gave Jesus a lesson in accounting, costs, and money.

Jesus knew what He was going to do. There has never been an emergency session in heaven. When God provides His strength, nothing is too hard or impossible. Jeremiah 32:27

Philip was looking strictly at the physical need and the impossibility of meeting that need. He missed the message of Jesus and its importance. He missed the miracle-working power of Jesus and its purpose.

Peter is not in the bullseye on this narrative, but he was there. Maybe he was looking, listening, and learning from Philip's mistakes.

No person is too small for God to use.

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" 8-9

Actually, there are people who are too big for God to use but no one too small.

While Philip was looking at the enormity of the problem with numbers of people and lack of funds, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, seemed to get a little further down the road of ministry vision, but still falls short of the finish line. Andrew took an honest look at resources.

Andrew identified the young lad with his personal lunch, but at this point, he questioned the ability of that lunch to feed the large crowd.

So, Andrew said they did not have enough food. Philip said they did not have enough money. Andrew did advise of what they did have but concluded that it was not enough. But he did provide the information. He was thinking. John is the only gospel writer to mention it was barley loaves, which was the inexpensive bread of the poor. One thing they both got right is that it would take a miracle outside their ability to feed all these people.

The impossibility of the situation requires a miracle.

Jesus does miracles.

The opportunity of the situation results in a miracle.

Now let us consider the boy with the five loaves and two fish.

The providence of God is our provision. Coincidence is when God chooses to remain anonymous. The Providence and grace of God rules over our lives.

Availability is more important than ability. Just showing up is a big part of the job.

Availability can elevate over obscurity. We do not know the boy's name, but we know the boy's work and availability. The goal is always to know the Lord's name not your name.

Availability can mitigate quantity. Not how many but what kind.

Availability can accelerate quality. Equips the called, not calls the equipped.

Availability can activate the extraordinary.

God is just looking for a vessel.

He is not looking for power because He has the power.

He is not looking for wisdom because He has the wisdom.

He is not looking for the plan because He has the plan.

He is looking for a vessel.

He is looking for availability not ability. Because He has the ability. God is able to do far more abundantly than you can ask or think according to the power that is at work within you. Now to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21

What others think is not as important as what God does. What Philip and Andrew thought was not as important as the boy's availability and participation. What Philip and Andrew thought was not as important as Jesus' ability.

Giving your all does matter. It appears the lad gave all he had because that is what Jesus asks. He gave all that he had, but he had all that he wanted to eat.

Whoever saves his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save his life.
Mark 8:35

God's purpose is greater.

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. When they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost." So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." 10-14

Peter, along with his disciple brothers, learned the lesson of provision. God is Jehovah Jireh, which means the God who provides. Peter observed several things about how God provides.

Jesus provided personally.

Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; 11

He took the food and distributed it himself. This is the key to the miracle "Jesus then took the loaves." Jesus makes all the difference in the world. If Jesus was not there, no miracle occurs. Always remember who the star of the show and it is not you nor me. We want the touch of Jesus, the hand of Jesus, the work of Jesus.

Jesus provided sufficiently.

...likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. When they were filled,... 11-12

Jesus is sufficient. His grace is abundant. His provision is more than enough. Jesus satisfies. The world and the things of it never satisfy. We think if only we made more money or our kids got out of trouble or something else we will be satisfied. But we are never satisfied with the things of this world nor circumstances. Only Jesus satisfies. Only Jesus is sufficient. In the end, only Jesus matters.

Adam and Eve were in paradise and perfection. They had everything they needed and more. But they were not satisfied with God and they fell into sin.

Jesus provided miraculously and generously.

When they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost." So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. 12-13

Jesus transforms a little into a lot. He takes our little and can make it a lot.
There was food left over-12 baskets of barley loaves.

Again, like the miracle at the wedding of Cana, probably not everyone knew where the food came from. With that many people, some may not have been able to see or hear what was going on right at that moment. Some probably only wanted to make sure they got something to eat.

See the miraculous and generous hand of Jesus. Do you see it? Are you aware of it? Some of you have grown up with all your needs being met with little hardship. You could be taking for granted the miraculous and generous hand of God over your life. When you do not see His hand, you become ungrateful and entitled and dissatisfied. When you see His hand and His generosity, you will be grateful. You will be amazed. You will be filled with joy.

Jesus provided purposefully.

Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." 14

Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal. John 6:27

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst." John 6:35

Jesus is spiritual bread.

Jesus is sustaining bread.

Jesus is satisfying bread.

Jesus is saving bread.

What lessons on provision that Peter learned resonate with you? How have you seen God provide for you and your family?

The greatest thing Jesus gave them that day was not fish and bread, but it was faith.

One defining experience of Peter with Jesus was walking on water in the storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

Jesus led His disciples into danger while He went up to the mountain to pray.

The disciples were in a storm and according to other Gospel writer accounts, they were very afraid.

Jesus walks on the water out to them. Initially, the disciples were afraid of Jesus walking out to them on the water. Some thought it was a ghost.

Jesus spoke to the disciples which calmed them. They recognized His voice.

This event is one that Peter shared with his disciple brothers, but it is also one in which he literally stepped out alone. It was specific and particular for Peter.

Peter had a vision of joining Jesus on the water. He asked Jesus to command him to come out of the boat into the water. In some ways, we must commend Peter by exercising faith in the command of Jesus. Peter did not want to get out on the water if Jesus was not going to be with him and for him in this risky adventure. It could also be argued Peter wanted to be where Jesus was. It was not just the thrill of walking on the water, but it was to be where Jesus is. He was willing to abandon the safe boat so he could be with Jesus.

Discuss Peter's desire to be with Jesus, to stand with Jesus, and risk for Jesus.

Peter stepped out of the boat and walked on the water towards Jesus. The text then says, "...seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink..." He first took his eyes off Jesus and began to "see the wind." Jesus was better and stronger than the wind, but Peter could not be looking at Jesus and the wind at the same time. The wind reminded Peter of his weakness and lack of command over the wind. His focus on the wind led to fear. And then his fear led to him sinking. A lack of faith gives way to fear and to sinking.

Discuss the sinking of Peter. What caused his sinking? How does what Peter did, stepping out of the boat in faith and then in a matter of moments sinking, compare with what you have done? Be specific about a time you started out in faith but ended up in fear.

The only solution to sinking is to cry out to Jesus. That is exactly what Peter did. He cried out to Jesus. The text says, *"he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'"* The content of his cry is significant. *"Lord, save me!"* He first called Jesus Lord. With all Peter's faults, the one thing he understood and believed is Jesus is Lord. Knowing Jesus first and foremost will be enough to get you out of your mess. His next words were *"Save me!"* He was not looking for just a little help. He knew he needed to be saved. He was in over his head. He was incapable of overcoming gravity to stay afloat. He was unable to swim out of the grip of the storm. He needed an all-out rescue squad to save him.

Discuss the biblical action of crying out to God. Who else in Scripture has cried out to God?

What does a biblically appropriate cry out to God include?

Jesus took Peter's hand, ushered him into the boat, and rebuked him for having little faith. It is always a matter of faith. Before we get too down on Peter, let us consider a few things. First, Peter did walk on the water. He did sink, but before sinking, he experienced the miracle of walking on water.

What did Jesus do in response to Simon Peter's cry out to Him? What has Jesus done for you when you have cried out to Him?

Also, Peter was the only disciple to walk on water. So, he indeed was the leader. Although he was rebuked by Jesus for having little faith, he had more faith than all the other disciples. Not only was he the first one to get out of the boat, but he was also the only one to get out of the boat.

Discuss the reality of Peter being the only disciple to step out on the water. Consider David was the only one who faced Goliath. Discuss the idea someone has to go first.

In Peter's case, no one went second. Peter's action did not lead to a movement of walking on water. What is the significance of Peter walking on water, albeit it not lasting long? Was his walking on water a failure or an exercise of great faith?

Another personal experience Peter had with Jesus was what we call the Transfiguration.

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."

This is one of the occasions Jesus distinguished between the three disciples He was closest to and the other nine disciples. Peter, James, and John were taken by Jesus up to what we call the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter, as always in Scripture, is listed first in the list of disciples. Jesus pulled “the rock” and the “sons of thunder” away from the others on two other occasions: Jesus healing Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56) and in the Garden of Gethsemane. The reason for pulling these three aside is mostly speculation on our part. But it is reasonable to consider they were destined for particular leadership roles in the future church planting movement.

Some certainly believe Jesus’ statement in Matthew 16:28 pertaining to some standing here will not die until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.

Most early scholars believe this mountain is Mount Tabor. Mount Herman has also been proposed. Recent scholars tend to suggest Mount Meron which is the highest mountain in Israel as the best suggestion. There is a location today we visit as this possible sight. The Catholic Church, like many sites in Israel, have built a church on what they consider this holy site.

The precise site is not as important as that it actually happened. In general, most scholars believes this was glimpse into the future glory of Jesus that is on the way.

What happened?

Matthew records very succinctly and specifically Jesus was “transfigured.” The word is where we get our word “metamorphosis” from. It means to be transformed. It is an aorist passive verb that speaks that Jesus did not transform Himself, but He was transformed. Basically, what we know is His appearance changed. Certainly, Jesus did not change from His essence because He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light ²

His skin and clothes shine with dazzling brilliance and whiteness, suggesting glory, sovereignty, and purity.¹

Then, Moses and Elijah appeared with them talking to Jesus. What an amazing experience the Lord Jesus was giving Peter, James, and John.

Then, Peter opened his mouth.

Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁴

Instead of basking in the glory of the moment and listening to learn what he could, Peter had to say something. I have been around long enough, and around preachers in particular long enough, to witness people who often speak when they have absolutely nothing to say or offer. I have known some people who are like clockwork. When given the opportunity, whether an open microphone or just the cordial “Does anyone want to add anything to the discussion,” you can always count on them to say something. That is Peter. It is hard to believe Peter would interrupt a conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah like he had something to contribute.

¹Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 263). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Consider being aware when there is a movement of God or a God moment that is to be experienced and not explained or expressed. Not only was it a mistake for Peter to speak, but it was a mistake in what he said. Our intentions are to discuss the great confession of Peter in the next lesson. Along with the great confession comes the great rebuke. Peter got the confession right, but honestly, he got a lot wrong. This is another one of those times.

Unlike with my friends and associates who keep speaking when they have little or nothing to contribute, Peter is interrupted "while he is still speaking" to leave no doubt he had even more to say. A bright cloud overshadowed them and a voice spoke out of the cloud distinguishing Jesus unique from all. "This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well-pleased. Listen to Him." This is the same statement from heaven given at Jesus' baptism. Then the clear instruction and command, "Listen to Him." Do not listen to Moses. Do not listen to Elijah. Certainly, do not listen to Peter. Listen to Jesus.

This instruction was enough to cause the disciples to fall face down on the ground. Peter is not mentioned specifically again in this section. He fades into the group.

Fortunately for them, Jesus is gracious and comes to them and tells them to get up and not be afraid. That is a common word from Jesus to His disciples through the ages and in this age. He is telling Valiant Warriors everywhere to get up and do not be afraid. The Holy Spirit is saying, "Listen to Him."

Discuss a special time when you experienced the presence of the Lord in an unusual way.

Discuss a time when you think you missed a great opportunity when the Lord was doing something incredible.

What are some reasons we do not see or experience special times of worship and awakening related to the Lord?

What did Peter do wrong in this opportunity with the Lord?

Another unique experience Simon Peter shared with the Sons of Thunder and Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Matthew 26:36-46

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. Then He came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. "Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

Matthew's account of the Garden only mentions Peter by name and does so first, as always, in Scripture. Jesus was grieved and distressed. He asked these three to stay with Him and keep watch with Him. While He was in the depths of grieving prayer, He discovered these three had fallen asleep. My thoughts are let someone else have a chance. These guys have blown a great opportunity. When he found them sleeping, he spoke to Peter as the leader. He questioned them with a rhetorical question, "You cannot stay awake and keep watch for Me for one hour?" He warned them about the weakness of their flesh and the possibility of falling into temptation. He found them a second and third time sleeping instead of watching or praying. After the third time, the time to pray was done. His betrayal was at hand.

Obviously, the three times of falling asleep accompanied by the warning of falling into temptation brings to mind the three denials of Peter. While our study is about Peter and we are focusing on the repeated flaws of his followship of Jesus, James and John also were falling asleep. It appears from this text Jesus is expecting more of Peter. The three times falling asleep precede three denials, which follow three questions "Do you love Me?" followed by "Feed My sheep." The number three is a significant number in Scripture and certainly plays an important role in the life and ministry of Peter.

Discuss the significance of the number three in Peter's life.

Discuss the struggle of extended prayer.

Discuss the connection between struggling in prayer and falling into temptation.

How would you explain the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak?

week four
FLAWED FORSAKER

It is difficult to discuss Peter without discussing his flaws. We have alluded to them throughout the study in anticipation to this lesson where we see Peter fully exposed. We certainly anticipate the two subsequent lessons of restoration and fruitful ministry. What makes these next two lessons so amazing is understanding the repeated nature and depth of Peter's sin.

It could be said he was frequently flawed. It is amazing that so much is written about his failures and yet he is the leader of the disciples. John was much more generous to himself in his gospel and epistles. John is even pictured as outrunning Peter as if it matters. It obviously mattered to John.

Some have speculated so much is known of Peter's flaws because perhaps he openly acknowledged his flaws. Some think he was super transparent. Some say he understood grace and forgiveness because he experienced it firsthand and frequently.

We will look into his greatest moment of the Great Confession followed by the most pointed rebuke given to Peter by Jesus. It is amazing these two polar opposite moments occur almost simultaneously. How often does a great achievement frequently lead to great blunder? There are a variety of reasons that could be considered.

We will look at Simon Peter's rebuke by Jesus in the context of what he had gotten right that really elevated him above all the other disciples.

This account is in Matthew 16.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

The Great Confession

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

In this great confession, we see the great potential in the life of Peter. Jesus was asking His disciples who do people say that He is? The disciples answered with a variety of things. But then Jesus made it personal for the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"

I am sure you have been in a class or group when someone posed a question. Many of us are hesitant to answer for fear of being wrong even when we are relatively certain we are right. We hesitate because of the pressure and do not speak up.

On the other hand, there are those of you who always answer even if it is wrong. That is Peter. But on this occasion, he is exactly right.

Peter answered with what many have called the Great Confession. "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." In that statement, Peter connected Jesus to the Old Testament prophecies of a coming Messiah. Christ was not Jesus' last name. It was the designation of the Promised One, the Anointed One. He also declared the deity of Jesus by saying He was the Son of the Living God. Peter gets an A+ on this oral examination.

Jesus affirms what Peter said and attributed his answer to revelation from God. God made known to Peter how to answer that question. This must be the high point of Peter's life and ministry with Jesus. Remember that while Jesus was on earth, His disciples were understudies and not yet elevated to real leadership. This confession was so important that many have misunderstood what happened after this confession.

Discuss Peter's confession. What are the declarations Peter made about Jesus?

Discuss the opportunities and challenges of speaking up in public about Jesus.

The Great Confession is followed by a great confusion. Some things were clear and some were confusing.

"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. Matthew 16:18-20

Simon, the son of Jonah, was given the name Peter, petras which means "rock."

This is not the first time Simon has been called Peter (cf. John 1:42), but it is certainly the most famous. Jesus' declaration, "You are Peter," parallels Peter's confession, "You are the Christ," as if to say, "Since you can tell me who I am, I will tell you who you are."¹

It is the next statement that has given the erroneous conclusion Peter was declared the first pope. There are so many reasons this cannot be the case, but I do not want to go down the rabbit hole in this study. That is not to say it is not important because the world is populated with millions upon millions of Catholics who believe this (although some do not).

Discuss the leadership of Peter. Discuss other leaders in the Bible. It does appear that when God did something significant in Scripture He raised up a leader. Discuss the importance of leadership. Discuss the problem of lack of spiritual leadership.

¹Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, pp. 251–252). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Below is an explanation by Baptist New Testament scholar, Craig Blomberg, that varies some from the traditional Protestant Reformation explanation. Basically, Blomberg contends Peter is the rock that He will build His first church on (Acts 2-12), but in no way is there any reference or insinuation of organizational government in what Jesus was saying. While this does not need to be the topic of in depth discussion in our Valiant Warrior small groups, below is Blomberg's explanation of these verses for your reference.

It is often alleged, however, that the "rock" must be Christ or Peter's confession of Christ, especially since the days of Luther and the Protestant Reformation. These alternatives understandably react against traditional Roman Catholic equation of Peter with the first pope and against an elaborate ecclesiology built on this verse. But a legitimate interpretation of vv. 18b–19, as below, predicates nothing of this, so there should be no theological objections to taking Peter as "this rock." A distinction between "Peter" and "this rock" is also often affirmed on the basis of the two different Greek words, but grammar requires this variation because the ending of *petra* ("rock") is feminine and could not be used for a man's name. The underlying Aramaic would have used *kepha* in both instances, in which case the problem disappears altogether.

So what does Jesus promise Peter? He will be the foundation on which Christ will build his "church." Here is the first use of *ekklēsia* in the Gospels. It occurs only three times, all in Matthew, and the other two references are both in 18:17. Many hold that Jesus did not conceive of establishing a church and that these verses are later Matthean insertions. But the nature of Jesus' instruction to his community of followers certainly implied their continued existence in some form, even if there is little of an "institution" yet in view. Moreover, the word *ekklēsia* in Hellenistic Greek often simply meant an assembly, as is also true of the underlying Aramaic *qāhāl*—a gathering of people for a particular purpose. In the Old Testament these gatherings normally involved the Israelites at worship, so that precisely such a community surrounding the Messiah had become a standard Jewish expectation. Jesus, however, implies nothing here of any particular church structure or government; he merely promises that he will establish a gathered community of his followers and help them to grow.²

The next phrase is not controversial for the Christ follower. Jesus will build His church and the gates of Hades, which is the place of death, will not prevail against it. Notice that its gates that do not prevail against the offensive onslaught of the church. Gates are not offensive weapons of warfare but are defensive weapons. Jesus was casting a vision of a church storming the gates of Hades. He was not portraying a retreating church holding off the enemy while waiting on reinforcements or the calvary to come.

Peter was closely connected to this prophecy of a church birth and exponential church growth documented in the first chapters of Acts. It is understandable and reasonable to consider Peter's role as the preacher at Pentecost where thousands were saved. Peter was prominent in healing (Acts 3) and continued growth in (Acts 4). Each chapter through the first 13 of Acts show Peter with a leading role. Without question, he was the primary human leader of the Pentecostal movement of church birth and growth.

In verse 19, Peter is promised the keys for the purpose of binding and loosing. This is really not new as Jesus had already given His disciples authority to cast out demons, heal the sick, and preach the gospel in Matthew 10. It is expected Jesus would transfer His authority to the church in proclaiming the gospel, selecting elders, administering the ordinances, sending out missionaries, disciplining new believers, and church discipline.

²Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, pp. 252–253). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Discuss some practical applications of Jesus giving the keys to the kingdom to Peter. (You may want to review Blomberg's notes below to help with talking points.)

Below are Blomberg's thoughts on these verses.

The metaphor of binding and loosing was variously employed in ancient Judaism but often was used for the interpretation of Torah and for decision making more generally. Many therefore support the GNB's "prohibit" and "permit," which would fit Jesus' use of these terms in 18:18 in the context of church discipline.³

But this translation reflects a fairly late, rabbinic usage; more immediate parallels suggest that one should pursue the imagery of keys that close and open, lock and unlock (based on Isa 22:22) and take the binding and loosing as referring to Christians' making entrance to God's kingdom available or unavailable to people through their witness, preaching, and ministry. This entrance to the kingdom will include the forgiveness of sins, tying this text in closely with John 20:23, which displays a very similar structure, and also with Jesus' use of the phrase "keys of knowledge" in Luke 11:52. Illustrations of Peter's privilege may then be found throughout Acts 1–12, in which Peter remains at the forefront of leadership in the early Christian proclamation of the gospel. It is also possible that Jesus envisions the unlocking of the powers of heaven to combat the attacking powers of the underworld.

A long and somewhat stalemated debate has centered around the future perfect passive verbs in v. 19. In Classical Greek a reasonable translation of these two verbs ("will be bound" and "will be loosed") would be "will have been bound" or "will have been loosed" (NIV marg.). Jesus would then be stressing how God's sovereign initiative is worked out in the church. But in Hellenistic Greek this construction was often roughly equivalent to a simple future passive (as in the main text of the NIV), in which case Jesus teaches that God has delegated his authority to the church, which he leaves to act on its own initiative to bring people into the kingdom, which entrance he then ratifies.¹¹¹ A mediating solution, supported by recent linguistic research, may be best with the translation will be in a state of boundedness/loosedness. Jesus' point, then, will simply be that God promises that all who enter the kingdom do so in accordance with God's sovereign will, without specifying one way or the other whose action caused whose response.

In a slightly different context Jesus repeats his promise of binding and loosing for all the disciples (18:18). Peter's privilege must therefore be qualified, as consistently elsewhere in Matthew. Peter is the disciples' spokesman, but as their representative and not just their leader. Ephesians 2:20 and Rev 21:14 will refer to all the apostles as the "foundation" of the church. Peter's primacy is more chronological, in the unfolding events of early Christianity, than hierarchical. Commentators often argue that Matthew has the highest view of Peter of any of the Gospel writers and closest to that of early Catholicism. But, as has already been seen, Matthew paints a consistently negative or at least ambiguous portrait of Peter, which may make it more probable that he was trying to temper an already overexalted view of that apostle.¹¹⁴ These verses do indeed provide the most positive portrait of Peter's understanding anywhere in the Gospels, yet vv. 22–23 will almost immediately modify that picture dramatically. Even in v. 20 Matthew retains Mark's messianic secret motif, all the more jarring in light of his expansion of Peter's confession in the previous verses. Verse 20 makes sense, however, because Peter's view of Jesus as Messiah is still inadequate. Peter is not yet prepared for the road to the cross, nor does he recognize that Jesus' death must precede the establishment of the church and that Jesus' followers must suffer before God's kingdom will triumph (vv. 24–28). Matthew may well be tempering a theology of glory prevalent in his day with a prevailing theology of the cross and/or trying to push his church into a more egalitarian and less hierarchical structure.

³Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 254). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

At any rate, there is obviously nothing in these verses of the distinctively Catholic doctrines of the papacy, apostolic succession, or Petrine infallibility or of the Protestant penchant for Christian personality cults. In fact, in Acts, Peter seems to decrease in importance as the church grows (on Peter's life more generally, see comments under 10:2). Instead, Matthew presents the challenging and exciting promise of God's presence with his entire church, as it seeks to witness and minister to the world, in a way that should encourage no one to despair but stimulate all to service. With this passage the largest section of Matthew's Gospel draws to a close (4:16–16:20), and the main body of Jesus' ministry is complete. Matthew has highlighted all facets of Jesus' words and works, save one—the road to the cross. Jesus has transferred his authority to his disciples so they can work wonders and bring people under God's rule. Now they must learn that they too have crosses to bear.⁴

The Great Confession and the great promise of Jesus for building His church and empowering His church was quickly followed by another Simon Peter blunder.

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." Matthew 16:21-23

Jesus began showing His disciples He would die on the cross and be raised. The scribes and priests would be the human instruments of His suffering. It is interesting that upon hearing this Simon Peter took Jesus aside and "began to rebuke Him." Talk about it going to your head! Peter is given the name "rock." He is given the keys to the kingdom and the authority of loosing and binding. And the first thing he does is rebuke Jesus. What a colossal...whatever!

If anyone had any doubt whether Peter fulfilled the made up role and infallibility of a Pope, this gigantic fall should erase any doubt Peter was a flawed sinner extraordinaire. Peter could not have been more wrong about Jesus' mission. He said, "God forbid it! This will never happen to you!" Peter did not get it at all. Even if he did not get it, he could have just kept his mouth shut trusting in the wisdom of Jesus. He had seen His miracles and heard His teaching. But not Peter. He could not keep his mouth shut. He could not listen and think and show self-restraint while contemplating. If it is on his mind, it is out of his mouth.

Discuss the problem of speaking before thinking. What things did Peter not consider when he was "rebuking" Jesus?

This is as strong a rebuke Jesus could offer. He said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan." He was positioning Peter in the back of the line. Just a few moments earlier, Peter was elevated and encouraged with his heaven-revealed confession demonstrating keen insight into the person and work of Jesus. But on top of being put behind Jesus, he was called Satan. He went from being called "rock" to being called "Satan." Some might speculate Jesus was not speaking to Peter, but was speaking directly to Satan. Jesus was responding to what had come out of Peter's mouth. No one present would have thought Jesus was talking to someone else other than Peter.

Discuss the rebuke of Peter by Jesus. Consider how Peter must have felt.

What is the significance of Jesus' rebuke (instead of ignoring what Peter had said)?

⁴Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, pp. 254–257). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

This event along with three-time denial are certainly the low points Simon Peter's spiritual journey. In both cases, he was crossways with Jesus. It was not that he was having conflict with the other disciples, which he probably frequently had. He had rebuked Jesus.

Last week, we included the Scripture from the Garden of Gethsemane account. It was one of the unique experiences Peter was given, along with the sons of thunder, to watch and pray with and for Jesus. He fell asleep three different times. He was the leader. If the leader cannot stay awake and pray, what do you expect from the others?

When Judas came to Jesus in his betrayal and they took Jesus into custody, Peter cut off the ear of Malchus. Jesus again rebuked Peter for what he did.

In the case of Malchus and even his rebuke of Jesus, Peter was passionate about Jesus. He did not want to see Him die because he loved Him and cared deeply for Him. In some ways, we can look upon Peter with some degree of empathy and even a warped appreciation for his zeal and passion even though it was often in the wrong direction.

What are some of the blunders of Peter's life and ministry?

How does it make you feel when reading about Peter's mistakes?

How would you describe Peter as a person based upon what you know about him now?

How do you think Peter got along with the other disciples?

What is it about Peter that makes him a leader?

The catastrophic collapse of Peter was his denial of Christ. He had foreshadowed such a day with his frequent and colossal blunders. No one probably saw this coming except for Jesus.

Let us take an in-depth look at the denial of Jesus by Simon Peter. At times, it has been beneficial to contrast Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial of Christ.

John 18:1-27

The greatest traitor of all time is the subject of our study today- Judas Iscariot.

As we think about betrayal, we quickly make it personal to us as the one who has been betrayed. While it may provide some benefit to conjure up those emotions of what does it feel like to be betrayed, this lesson is not one of encouragement to those who have been betrayed. Rather it is a warning, a caution, a corrective rebuke to you as one who is prone to wander and leave the one you love as Robert Robinson wrote in his well-known hymn "Come Thou Fount." There has been much debate if Robinson had written in his early years a self-fulfilling prophecy as he became closely acquainted with Socialism which leads to Universalism denying the deity of Christ.

We all know too many people who have walked away from God. Sometimes our theology prevents us from having an honest conversation about walking away from God. Those of us who hold to eternal security and progressive sanctification and growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ do not have a good explanation for people walking away from God.

This discussion is practical although it is firmly rooted and grounded in the Scripture. It is not theoretical and philosophical. The Bible is full of warnings to not walk away, fall away, return to the world. Today, we will not seek to theologically explain walking away from God. Instead, we are going to look at two people and one group who walked away from God. Two of these walked away to never get back to God. One denied Christ but was able to return to Christ. We hope to see the difference. We hope to help people who have walked away to find the way back to God. I think we will discover the way back to Jesus is through Jesus.

In this day, many marvel what some are calling "deconstruction of faith." This has almost become a popular trend cloaked in a self-righteous intellectualism with the church as the whipping post excuse for a person committing the sin of Judas, at worst, and hopefully the sin of Peter at best.

This passage is about betrayal, denial, and indifference. A wide range of emotion and action takes place in these verses. Through it all, *Jesus knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth (4)*. While it appears Jesus is the subject of the whims of ungodly men and foolish decisions, Jesus was guaranteeing the plan of God would be fulfilled as ordained. His initiative in the words He spoke demonstrate His sovereignty over all and His willing cooperation to fulfill His God-ordained plan.

Jesus is a step closer to the cross. There is a thematic shift to His death. There has been a purposeful journey toward the cross. We are now getting close. It is getting too close for comfort.

The closer you get to the cross the comfort ceases, the crowd decreases, and the faith crises increases.

John 18:1-27

*When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden, in which He entered with His disciples. Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples. Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am He." And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. So when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way," to fulfill the word which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one." **Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"** So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people. **Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.***

The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. "Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said." When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Peter's Denial of Jesus

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it, and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

Three representatives walked away from God. They literally walked away from God being Jesus by betrayal, arrest and questioning, and denial. Let us see what happened and ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds so as to avoid the pathway of sinners that leads to such apostasy.

We obviously know Peter made it back to Christ and to fruitful and abundant ministry. We pray that is your journey destination today. We will briefly consider Judas and the Roman soldiers, but most of our discussion focuses on Simon Peter.

Now consider briefly the most perplexing person in Scripture, Judas.

We know Judas betrayed Jesus for money. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss.

Let us look at our text.

*Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples. Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am He." **And Judas also, who was betraying Him**, was standing with them.*
John 18:2-5

Judas...

...betraying Jesus 2, 5

...having received the Roman cohort...3

...standing with them (priests/soldiers)...5

How could someone who had walked with Jesus for these three years be so deceived to betray Him? This was not a passive unbelief. This was an aggressive, conspiracy of betrayal.

The text states Judas was "betraying Jesus" (2,5) and "standing with" the soldiers and the priests. He had changed his allegiance and company because of the betrayal. This lesson is not so much about how we handle being betrayed as it is about when we act as the betrayer. God, who has given us everything, is betrayed by Judas and by us.

From Luke 22:3

3...one of twelve **A person of extraordinary privilege.**

3...Satan entered into Judas. **A person of evil devil possession.**

4...discussed...how he might betray Him. **A person of evil planning.**

John had previously recorded:

John 6:70-71; *have I not chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil*

John 12:6 *he was a thief and cared not for the poor*

Judas betrayed Jesus.

R. G. Lee asked the question "Is Judas the only sailor on the ship of infamy?" From all we can see from Scripture, Judas was evil to the core. He was a thief, did not care about the poor, he gave allegiance to the devil. Is he one of a kind? Or as Lee said, it is easier to trace Judas' succession than the apostolic succession. How many people through the ages have betrayed Christ with a kiss or for money or for power? How many have pretended to be one thing only to be another?

You can put a skunk in a perfume factory, but it will still stink. You can repaint a freezer full of meat that has been unplugged for week, but it will still stink. You can put spoiled milk in a new carton, but it will still make you gag. You can put on a suit or clean clothes or even cool clothes and sit in church, but it is just the outward and does not make you a Jesus follower with a heart for Him. It requires a transformation of the heart. That is why Jesus said you must be born again. Not only is the ship of infamy full of sailors, we have all been one of those sailors or still are one of those sailors.

Briefly discuss Judas betrayal of Jesus. How does a person see the miracles and hear the teaching of Jesus and actively, aggressively betray Him?

Now Peter enters the scene, and he reacts in a passionate anger against Malchus on behalf of Jesus.

Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" John 18:10-11

Peter is introduced in verse 10. He too would be denying Christ. He is cutting off Malchus' ear and then is rebuked by Jesus.

Peter fought the wrong enemy.

He had the wrong motives.

He had the wrong weapon. Instead of the sword of the Spirit...

He had the wrong result.

Peter is actively denying Jesus. John 18:15-18; 25-27

He is not denying Him by what he did not do for Christ. He is denying Jesus with his words, just the opposite of what he had said he would do.

Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself. John 18:15-18

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it, and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed. John 18:25-27

Peter was warming himself. He was looking for a way to get out of the cold and keep warm. He was willing to deny Jesus to keep his spot around the warming fire. He exchanged the company of Jesus for the slaves around the fire. He had sunk from his bold assertions to cowardly whimpers.

How many of you young men have stayed by the warming fire of the culture, the world, the devil, and the flesh instead of identifying clearly and boldly for Jesus? You have either been like the soldiers or just do not care in your indifference concerning Jesus. Or you have been like Peter, talking big in one setting and being a coward when the audience changes? How many of you parents are too afraid your son will lose his starting position on the traveling team, so you compromise and keep your kids out of church week after week after week and lie to yourself and to everyone else that having a 10-minute devotion in the dugout or hotel is the same thing as the gathered church of the Lord Jesus Christ where singing, praying, preaching, baptism, and multi-generational fellowship and service take place?

How could Peter do this?

Peter was overconfident in himself. Luke 22:33
Lord, I am ready to go both to prison and to death!

If you have over-the-top self-confidence, you are most likely not humble.
God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.

Pride comes before a fall.

If you think you could not or would not deny Christ, then you are overconfident. You are not humble. You are blinded to your own denial and betrayal.

Peter was emotionally extreme.

He cut off Malchus' ear.
He made boastful claims.
He prayed too little.
He slept too much.
He acted too quickly.
And he walked away from God.

Peter did what benefitted himself and his emotions.

He did not want to lose his place at the warming fire.
He went along with the crowd when he did not think Jesus was watching.
The emotions that made him look bold exposed his fear in another setting.

Here is the most important point about Peter.
He did come back. So, you can too. Be more like Peter and not Judas.

Discuss what led to Peter's denial.

How can someone bounce back after such a colossal fall?

Let us consider the difference between Judas and Peter. I must confess it is easier to assess what happened than it is to understand it in real time. Some of the behaviors of Judas and Peter looked similar in real time. Ultimately, God settles it all in the end. Jesus told us in the parable of the wheat and tares to let the weeds/tares grow up side by side with the wheat. In the final harvest, the wheat and tares will be separated.

So what was the difference for Peter?

Peter was convicted of his sin. True conviction results in repentance.

Peter was repentant of his sin.

Peter was restored out of his sin.

Peter was obedient after his sin.

Peter was fruitful after his sin.

Obviously, we would conclude Peter was a saved man, one given to Jesus, chosen and elect. But the evidence of that was demonstrated after his denial. At that moment or season of his denial, from the outside, Peter looked like a lost man, a betrayer of Jesus just looking out for himself.

Judas walked away from God and surrendered to Satan. He would not and could not get back to God.

Peter walked away from God for a moment but repented and returned and was restored.

Peter heard God's voice saying, "Do you love Me? Then feed My sheep. "

We are a room full of men who have denied, betrayed, and been indifferent about Christ. For some of us, we have repented and been restored. For some it is time for you to return, repent, and receive the grace and forgiveness and restoration God has for you. Unfortunately, some will choose the road that leads to destruction. It is the broad road. It is the road most people go down. You will have a lot of company on that journey. You just will not have Jesus. That journey will offer popularity, money, self-indulgence, worldly pleasures and lusts, fame, worldly applause. It often leads to addiction, loss, grief, brokenness, depression, deception, anger, malice, immorality, and so much more.

If God has given you grace and light today to return to Christ through repentance, it is a precious gift that not all will experience today. Do not miss out on what God has for you today.

What was similar between Peter's denial and Judas' betrayal?

What was different between Peter and Judas?

What were the indicators of Peter's potential fall?

What were the keys to Peter's leadership?

What will be the key for Peter's restoration?

week five
FORGIVEN FOLLOWER

I have been on a few trout fishing trips on the White River. Without a doubt, my more fruitful trips have been with a guide. Why is that? Well simply because the guide knew where the fish were. You can fish all day in water that contains no fish, and you will not catch any fish. You can have the best pole, the best reel, the best bait, the best boat, the best hat, the best sunglasses, the best fishing shirt and pants; but as long as you fish where there are no fish, you will catch nothing. The benefit of having a guide is that the good ones know where the fish are.

We began our study of Simon Peter on the banks of the Sea of Galilee. The gospels choose to end with Peter again fishing in the Sea of Galilee. His journey has taken him many places with many experiences, but he returns to his old profession in a familiar place.

You would think Simon Peter would be a great fishing guide. It was his business. He was the responsible one in the group with his brother Andrew and their business partners James and John. But on this occasion, Simon Peter needed some help.

Simon Peter has denied Jesus three times at the most critical time in Jesus' life after declaring that even if everyone else left Him, he would never leave Him. But he did. It was the biggest blunder and failure of his life. He had let down Jesus, his disciple brothers he led, and himself.

Remember Peter's denial. What kind of emotions and thoughts does a person have after a gigantic failure? How do people react when they have had a somewhat or overt well-known failure? How do other people react to those who have had such failures? How do you think the other disciples treated Peter? Assume there were a variety of responses.

Today we are going to look at the next chapter in Peter's life. Some might think such a horrendous failure would spell the certain end to Simon Peter. It would be natural to think, "We will never hear anything from him again." While Peter's failure would not be considered a moral failure and probably not a doctrinal failure, it was a friendship failure. It was a courage failure. It was a self-serving failure. In some ways this kind of failure is just as bad, or even worse, considering who was the victim of this failure. Jesus, who had given everything and done nothing wrong ever, was betrayed. It was the old "say one thing and do another thing" dance. Peter was the braggadocios big mouth always saying what he was going to do in comparison to what others would not do. He was the guy many people were glad to see fail. How many people do you think were pulling for Peter along the way?

Simon Peter is conspicuously absent from those who were around the cross or took care of His body. Even the immediate resurrection appearances seem to highlight others like the women around the tomb and those on the Emmaus Road. After such a fall, his absence and lack of prominence is understood.

In many ways, we are all Simon Peter. We have said and intended to do things that we did not do. We told people we would get back with them or do something for them or come by and see them. Only, we never did. These embarrassing moments shame us every time they come to mind. How much more would Simon Peter's failure cause him to shudder when he considered what he did?

Well, I hope we can all sense the shame, embarrassment, and guilt Peter felt after that denial. It is understanding and experiencing such shame that makes the grace of Jesus seem so much greater to us. It causes us to be overwhelmed with how much God has forgiven us. It causes us to not feel so entitled or mistreated or misunderstood. It causes us to get our eyes off ourselves and gaze upon the One Who is greater. This Greater One loves us and pursues us and gives us renewed purpose. Your failure is not final. Your failure was inevitable. Your failure is why Jesus came. Your failure is why Jesus died. Your failure is why Jesus rose again. Your failure is why Jesus is returning.

Satan would have you to stay in your past and wallow like a pig in mud in your guilt. But it is amazing the extremes that Jesus goes to welcome back His disciples.

Consider Peter's failure in light of your own failure. Consider the amazing grace of God in coming to you as He did Peter.

Let us look at the way back through the initiative, forgiveness, and re-calling of Peter.

The last chapter of John's Gospel after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection shows us the difference in catching fish and not catching fish. After fishing all night, the disciples caught no fish. In a matter of minutes, by putting the net on the other side of the boat, the disciples catch a net full of fish. The difference was Jesus acting as their fishing guide told them where to put the net. He told them to put the net where the fish were.

This is the epilogue of the book. While the signs or miracles of the Gospel of John officially recorded are seven and are bookended between John 2 and John 11, here in the last chapter we again see the miracle of Jesus' presence.

John 21

*After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. **This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.***

Jesus takes the initiative in manifesting Himself to His disciples. They had denied Him. Peter, in the most known story of his three-time denial, was not the only one who denied Jesus at this time. They all abandoned Him.

A great principle for all leaders to learn is that Jesus took the initiative in restoring the relationship with His disciples even though they abandoned Him. In a way, outside God's sovereign plan of discipleship expansion, Jesus did not need anything from His disciples. They needed Him. Jesus demonstrated selfless leadership initiative for the good of others. That is a great leadership principle to embody.

*After these things **Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples** at the Sea of Tiberias, and **He manifested Himself in this way.** John 21:1*

Before Jesus came to them, the disciples went fishing without Jesus. Peter again is in the lead. So, whatever the disciples thought of Peter's denial, they find themselves with him and following his lead again. They had returned to what they knew how to do. It could have been out of necessity for food or income. It could have been out of comfort in the past or familiar. It could be doing what they knew to do.

The disciples fished all night on their own and caught nothing.

Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. John 21:2-3

Discuss why you think the disciples and Peter in particular went fishing. Does this connect with your behavior or tendency after a great failure or disappointment?

There were seven of them and they were net fishing, and they caught nothing. They fished all night. These were skilled fisherman who made their living fishing. While this literally happened, the Bible is a spiritual book with spiritual application. Jesus had already told His disciples that without Me, you can do nothing. Jesus had called His disciples to become fishers of men. I do not think it is too far of a stretch to make the connection to fishing for men.

Valiant Warriors need to be reminded that without Jesus, you can do nothing.

Without Jesus, it does not matter how well intentioned you are. Their intentions were to catch fish. This is a noble goal especially in relation to spiritual fishing. It was noble to work or fish to feed yourself, your family, and others.

Without Jesus, it does not matter how many or who is with you.

The elite disciples were there. There were seven of them. Seven is the perfect number. But Jesus was not with them, so they did not catch any fish. If Jesus is not with you, you will not catch any men, reach any people, or have spiritual fruit that will be abundant and will remain.

Without Jesus, it does not matter how long or hard you fish.

These guys fished all night and no fish. That is really hard to do, except how many of us have fished all day or hunted all day without a bite or without seeing anything? It does not matter how hard you work or what you do if Jesus is not with you.

Jesus told them what to do and produced an abundant catch.

The disciples experienced the fruitful outcome of an abundant catch.

But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. John 21:4-8

Valiant Warriors need to be reminded of the difference Jesus makes.

Things can change in a hurry when you are hunting and fishing. You go from nothing to awesome in a matter of moments. Hours of sitting with nothing, and in one moment everything can change. Many of us who have hunted white-tail deer, elk, bear, or turkey have gone from seeing nothing and hearing nothing to finding ourselves with a trophy standing right in front of us or a group in the middle of the decoys. I am in no way suggesting that invoking Jesus on your hunt to provide a trophy, although most of us have prayed that prayer before!

The point is we have experienced sudden change for the good and for the worse. When we are going about life without Jesus' influence and way, then we suddenly listen, submit, and obey Jesus, often times it brings a sudden change. It may not mean we catch a boat load of fish. But it will mean we have peace, purpose, and power we did not have without Him.

With Jesus, there are clear instructions.

Jesus told them to put the nets on the other side of the boat. Humanly, we would think simply moving the nets the width of the boat, from one side to the other, would make no difference or very little difference. The difference was not so much in where they placed the nets, but in Who they were listening to. One of the disciples had to be deciding where to put the nets and the boat up to this point. Most likely it was Peter. Now Jesus is giving clear instructions, maybe or most likely in direct opposition to what Peter had proposed.

With Jesus, there is abundant fruit.

They caught as many fish as the net would hold. They did not catch one or two or ten. They caught "a great number." They did not catch little fish either. They caught "large fish." They caught 153 large fish, to be exact, that filled the net. Jesus reached the full capacity of their net. Jesus provides abundant life, abundant fruit, and abundant grace.

With Jesus, there is extravagant enthusiasm.

When Peter and John understood it was Jesus Who was giving them instructions, Peter jumped out of the boat into the water. Jesus had some previous experience of getting out of the boat for Jesus. Peter did not jump out of the boat when the net was full. He jumped out of the boat when he understood Jesus was present. The great gift was not the big catch, but it was the presence of Jesus.

We rejoice in the fruitful harvest. We rejoice in the large numbers of people gathered to worship. But we jump in the water because Jesus is present. He is the One Who gives the fruit. He is the One Who guides us to where the catch is.

Discuss the story of how things changed suddenly. Discuss how this change in not catching fish one moment to catching fish the next moment impacted the disciples and Peter in particular.

Discuss the difference Jesus makes in this story and then in your story.

Peter and the disciples experienced the fruitful outcome of an unbreakable net.

*But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, **dragging the net full of fish.** John 21:8*

*Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, **the net was not torn.** John 21:11*

The net was the system or method used to get the fish in. They did not celebrate the net. They used the net for the harvest of the fish. Sometimes people have been guilty of worshiping or celebrating the method or system while neglecting the lack of fruit or fish. These disciples did not raise their empty nets and admire the net. They did not champion the look and style of an empty net.

It was not until there were fish in the net did they even know if the net was any good. Of course, the net proved to be sufficient for the great catch of large fish. It would have been a shame for there to be 153 large fish that broke the net and just swam off. Some of the most disappointed fishermen are those whose fish broke line just when they got the fish up to the boat. In this case, I certainly believe the net being strong enough to hold all these fish is another miracle. The God Who gives the fruitful harvest also gives the unbreakable net of discipleship that produces fruit which remains.

We do not worship or admire or elevate our systems and methods, but you have to have a pathway to get the fish in the boat or, even better, to the bank. If you get more fish than you can handle, then you need to get a bigger and stronger net. The net is our system or method of discipleship. God gives the fruit and the fish. God will empower and anoint the steps of assimilation and discipleship. If He does not, it will be like a broken net that sees a lot of fish swim off.

Peter and the disciples experienced the fruitful outcome of an enduring strength.

Optional Discussion: Discuss the importance of methods, strategies, and systems in leading the church and carrying out the Great Commission. Consider the growth of the early church for 12 disciples to 120 in the upper room to thousands being baptized. How would systems and strategies come into play in facilitating the movement of God? Or do you “just let go and let God” as some say?

*...So they cast, and then **they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.** John 21:6*

*Simon Peter went up and **drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three;** and although there were so many, the net was not torn. John 21:11*

Verse 6 tells us “they were not able to haul it in.” Then verse 11 tells us “Simon Peter went up and drew the net to the land, full of large fish.” They could not haul it in at first, but now Peter alone drew the net. What changed? What happened? Verse 10 happened.

Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.” John 21:10

Jesus told him to bring the fish. When Jesus guides, He provides. He does ask us to do things we cannot do. He does ask us to do things beyond our ability, capacity, and strength. But He never asks us to do anything He cannot do. He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think. What they could not do before, Peter can now do. What has never been done before can be done if Jesus is telling you to do it. Peter had the strength to bring the fish in.

Peter and the disciples experienced the fruitful outcome of an unconditional grace. The unconditional grace of Jesus is seen in His faithful initiative. His faithful initiative is extended in providing a meal for these disciple fishermen.

So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread.
John 21:9

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. John 21:12-13

These verses remind Peter and the disciples of their life with Jesus. How many times had they enjoyed a meal with Jesus on the seashore? Do they remember when Jesus asked for the fish and loaves before He fed the 5,000? Do they remember the Lord's Supper when He took bread and gave it to them? Does the charcoal fire remind Peter of his denial of Christ around a fire? When Jesus said "Come," did they flashback to His words "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest?"

The number three is prominent in Scripture. There are three persons of the Godhead. Jesus rose on the third day. Three times Peter denied Christ. Verse 14 says this was the third time Jesus manifested Himself to His disciples since His resurrection.

This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.
John 21:14

Jesus moves from more of an indirect and group interaction to a specific and intentional conversation with Simon Peter. This inquisition would serve as basis for Peter's restoration to ministry leadership. It should be noted it was not immediate. Jesus would have to ascend. Peter would have to wait in the Upper Room on the Holy Spirit to come. It was only after all that Peter would step out of the shadows to assume a prominent place of leadership in the birth and early expansion of the church.

Jesus reached out to Simon Peter in the context of him fishing with the other disciples. He spoke to them all with instruction pertaining to the nets and the fish. Jesus did not call Peter to the side to talk with him face-to-face at first. Nor did He rebuke him publicly in front of all the disciples. In some ways, it was a soft re-introduction. They did not even recognize Him immediately. It was like a new introduction to Jesus. It was not until Peter recognized Jesus that the story turns with Peter in the cross hairs.

Upon recognizing Jesus, Peter jumped in the water to be with Jesus. He did not run and hide in shame. Jesus then directed Peter to bring the fish for breakfast. Jesus prepared and enjoyed breakfast with the disciples. All of these interactions with Peter in the group and activity with the group most likely created a safe place in Peter's mind.

How would you explain Peter's reaction to recognizing Jesus considering Peter's past denial of Jesus? Why would he jump in the water to get to Jesus instead of withdrawing from Jesus?

After coming to His disciples and empowering them for a great catch of fish and sharing a meal with them, Jesus turns to Peter for a personal conversation of great importance.

This is the public restoration of Peter who had denied Christ three times after boasting that if all others fall away he would not. This passage functions as a public examination, instruction, and restoration of Peter. It ultimately would be Jesus' affirmation of Peter moving forward in ministry leadership.

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep." John 21:15-17

After Peter's failure,

Jesus cooked for him and fed him.

Jesus initiated the conversation.

Jesus questioned Peter.

Jesus re-called Peter to ministry leadership.

Discuss the steps Jesus took after Peter's denial for ministry leadership restoration to be considered.

Jesus asked Simon Peter the primary question for all ministry leaders.

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "**Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?...**" John 21:15

It is interesting Jesus framed the question with, "Love Me more than these?" It is because Peter frequently elevated himself above others. He stated that if everyone falls away, he would not. The same question is repeated three times.

He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?..." John 21:16

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" John 21:17

He asks do you *agapay* Me the first two times and the third time He asks do you *phileo* Me? Peter always responds with *phileo*. As many of you know, *agapay* is unconditional love. It is the kind of love God has for us. *Phileo* love is typically brotherly love (Philadelphia- the city of brotherly love). But in this context of a repeated questioning and the response of Peter, there should not be considered any distinction between the two words. Notice the Scripture in verse 17 states Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" using the word *phileo*. If the meaning was different, then it would not have been the third time but the first time using this new word.

Three times certainly reminds us, and Peter, of his three denials of Jesus.

It is considered by many this was a public restoration of Peter because his denial was public. The outspoken leader who did exactly opposite of what he boasted he would not do in denying Christ three times. It was important for those witnesses or those familiar with his denial hear the examination, instruction, and restoration of Peter.

The repetition also emphasized the importance of making sure and counting the cost.

The repetition also emphasizes the importance of recalls in ministry leadership. Sometimes these recalls are reminders, and some are redirections. The importance is a continuous walk and relationship with Jesus. The repeated call of God and reminders of God's Word are necessary for a long tenured ministry. We need today's grace, today's Word, today's touch, today's vision for ministry leadership today and tomorrow.

The content of the question is what is most important, "Do you love Jesus?" The question is not are you a good communicator? Do you have empathy? Are you a great charismatic leader? Are you smart? Are you educated? Am I happy with my loss of ministry leadership? The first and foremost necessity of a ministry leader is someone who loves Jesus.

Jesus asked this question three times to the point it frustrated Peter in having to answer the same question continually and repeatedly. He had to answer the same question because it was the main question.

Peter appealed to the omniscience of Jesus, "Lord you know that I love you." God does know. He knows your heart. He knows if you love Him or the world or fame or importance.

The question is not whether or not you love the ministry. Do you love Jesus? The first qualification of ministry is loving Jesus.

Certainly, loving people follows close behind, but I would submit to you that you cannot love people apart from loving Jesus.

Remember that when Peter recognized it was Jesus he jumped out of the boat and began to swim towards Him. Remember when Peter saw Jesus walking on water, he asked Jesus to call him out on the water and Peter began to walk on the water. Peter always valued the presence of Jesus. Even when he was stumbling and stumbling, he always loved being with Jesus. His amputation of Malchus' ear was in defense of Jesus whom he loved. In reality, Peter's denial was really out of character for him. It was really out of step with his devotion to Jesus. It shows how weak and susceptible to sin we are.

It should not surprise you that later in Acts 4:13, others noticed the confidence of Peter and attributed it to being with Jesus.

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

Jesus gives Simon Peter the primary task for ministry leaders. Each of these statements are a command that are continuous in action. He uses different words for sheep and lambs. He uses different words for tend and shepherd. There is no real distinction with the word choice.

...He said to him, "Tend My lambs." John 21:15

..."He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." John 21:16

... Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep." John 21:17

Peter is told what to do by Jesus. Jesus uses verbs and not nouns. Jesus does not say to be a pastor or feeder or teacher. Jesus tells Peter to shepherd as an action and feed as an action. This is not a position but an action. Most of us who serve as a pastor prefer the title "pastor" above any other title of recognition.

I have never particularly liked being called "Reverend." I certainly do not expect to be called "Doctor." (Although one of my previous pastors insisted on being called "Doctor" when his doctorate was an honorary D. D. Those of us with earned doctorates always refer to the D. D. degree stands for Didn't Do it. In some academic settings, it is more appropriate to recognize people with earned doctorates with the "Dr." prefix.) I certainly have been called "Brother Wes" often, especially the first 10 years of ministry.

As the years have gone by, I have become less and less concerned with what my title is. It is not the title that matters. It is the ministry that matters.

Notice Jesus did not tell Peter "You are now restored to ministry leadership." Jesus associates Peter's restoration with ministry action and responsibility. Ministry is not a title or an honor. It is a job. It is a responsibility. It is a calling.

Discuss the process Jesus took Peter through for ministry leadership restoration. Consider the repetitive examination that appears to be somewhat public.

How do you see ministry leadership restoration in today's church?

Considering all sin, what sin (or sins) require ministry leadership restoration by the church as compared to sin that does not require a formal restoration process by the church?

For those inclined toward ministry leadership, keep in mind.

The sheep are Christ's sheep and not Peter's.

The church belongs to Christ.

The sheep belong to Christ.

Pastors are sheep serving under the Lordship of Christ.

This passage does not establish the primacy of Peter as a pope. If anything, it emphasizes the grace, mercy, and forgiveness of Jesus to one who shot his mouth off and could not deliver. This is hope and help to all of us who will humble ourselves in repentance and future obedience.

When close comparisons are made with Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 4:1–4, it becomes clear that each shepherd of the flock of God, of Jesus' sheep, of the church of God, is to mirror both authority and a certain brokenness that is utterly exemplary. The Ephesian elders are to guard and shepherd the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers ('bishops'—but without any evidence to support a notion, this early, of monarchical bishops with authority over several parishes), while Peter pictures himself as a 'fellow elder' who can encourage other elders to be 'shepherds' and 'overseers' ('bishops'), 'being examples to the flock'. And all must give an account to the Chief Shepherd when he appears, the Lord Jesus himself. Thus there is nothing intrinsic to the language of John 21:15–17 that suggests a distinctive authority for Peter. All Christian leadership entails a certain tension between authority and meek, exemplary service, patterned finally on Jesus himself. In the context of the Fourth Gospel, these verses deal with Peter's reinstatement.¹

Without question, Simon Peter was reinstated to ministry leadership by the One most qualified for doing this. In today's world, some individuals might suggest Jesus has restored them to ministry leadership since their failure. We must remind ourselves Jesus is not physically present today, so He cannot and is not restoring people today the same way He did with Peter (in person and in front of the other disciples).

¹Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (pp. 678–679). Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

Remember in Matthew 16 Jesus gave the keys to the kingdom with the power to loose and bind to Peter. We understand authority has been given to the church that Jesus builds and blesses. That authority includes church discipline. So, biblical restoration of ministry is given to the church. Only the church can biblically restore a fallen ministry leader to ministry leadership. When a person tries to resume ministry leadership outside or without the clear approval and process of the local church which they are part of, then that restoration is not by biblical principle or precedent. The person who bypasses the church Jesus gives authority to is a person who seeks restoration by themselves most likely for selfish reasons. They are not trusting in the Lord's prescribed method and the Lord's people who make up the church. Their rush to restoration for whatever reason will ultimately undercut God's loving and gracious means of ministry leadership restoration.

Restoration looks different in different settings, but here are some basic informal principles of being restored to ministry leadership.

Everyone cannot be restored to ministry leadership.

Judas is a primary example. Alexander, Hymanaeus, and Demas were called out publicly as those who had abandoned the faith and/or cause great harm to the church or to Paul himself. Someone who has committed sexual immorality while serving in ministry leadership forfeits their ministry leadership. There are certain groups, denominations, and people who disagree with this. Sexual immorality and adultery in ministry leadership carries extreme consequences and impact on typically multiple families, relationships, children, churches, and ministries. It is a breaking of trust of the highest measure. Ministry is based on trust. Trust in Jesus and trust in leadership. Perfection is not possible. Sexual purity is possible and expected.

Just because in some cases ministry leadership cannot be restored, forgiveness can still be experienced. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all unrighteousness.

Sometimes, if not all the time, a change of ministry responsibility is required and restoration to the same ministry leadership position cannot happen. Obviously if you are in prison, your ministry leadership, if restored, will have to be carried out in prison. Restoration in no way advocates allowing ministry leaders to move to a different church for a fresh start without going through a process of confession, repentance, and restitution under biblical leadership of those with direct knowledge and responsibility of the sin.

Ministry leadership restoration should include:

Confess your failure and do not blame others.

Assume responsibility for your failure or sin.

Assuming responsibility includes accepting the consequences of your failure. Consequence can include restitution. It can and probably should include removal from an area of ministry leadership for a season or forever.

Await and submit to the biblical leadership's prescribed process of restoration. Often times, if not most times, the one who has failed wants instant restoration. For a variety of reasons, sometimes it takes time for full restoration to take place. **While Jesus was restoring Peter, it would not be until after the Upper Room waiting and the Holy Spirit coming that we actually see Peter in a ministry leadership role.** Peter's offense was a verbal denial of Christ. In doing so, his primary offense was against Jesus. His secondary offense was against his fellow disciples because he was the leader. Jesus could extend immediate restoration.

Move forward with humility and gratitude, with awareness of the consequences of your sin and the forgiveness of God through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Remember the primary question for ministry leadership.

Remember the primary assignment for ministry leadership.

Remember the initiative of Jesus in restoring us to ministry involvement.

The essence of the gospel is good news for a new beginning. The life of Peter is certainly a testimony of a flawed leader God had ordained for ministry leadership. The only kind of leaders God has are flawed leaders. So, you should be hopeful and encouraged God can still use you just like He did Peter.

As we will study next week, Peter's greatest days of fruitful ministry were after his denial of Christ. His lowest point served as a launching pad for future fruitful ministry. Unfortunately, many flawed ministry leaders have fallen into the discouraged on-the-shelf category. Satan is pleased to remove formerly empowered leaders from the spiritual workforce. Satan being an accuser of the brethren keeps many on the sidelines. These Valiant Warriors need to be reminded of God's sufficient grace and shed blood to forgive sins. Some are not humble nor repentant of their sin. They want instant restoration. They are unwilling to submit to the authority of the church. They want to restore themselves. Typically, this is indicative of pride and selfish ambition and self-promotion. When it comes to restoration, it is best to be humble and willing to labor in obscurity for Christ's sake. There are many brothers who already do so. You are not too good to join this multitude of the obscure faithful ones. In your willingness and pursuit of humble and obscure service, God may choose to move you to another assignment that has more visibility, more potential for visible fruit, and more responsibility. That is God's business and His doing. Do not pursue it or push it. Wait on the Lord and He will renew your strength.

Consider the clear restoration of Simon Peter to ministry leadership by Jesus.

How is that an encouragement to you?

How is that a challenge to you?

Have you allowed a past failure sideline you from ministry for a long period of time?

What needs to happen to get you back in the game of servant ministry leadership or ministry participation?

Have you been unwilling to pursue a biblical church-led process of restoration or is that what has kept you sidelined?

Are you willing to trust Lord, His church, His people, and His sovereign rule in orchestrating your life for ministry?

w e e k s i x
FRUITFUL FINISHING AND FINAL THOUGHTS

This is our final lesson on the life of Peter. We have only scratched the surface of an amazing life. This lesson explores Simon Peter's life after the resurrection of Jesus. It is taken from Peter's life as recorded by Dr. Luke in the book of Acts. I have included a lot of the Scripture in the first 12 chapters of Acts along with a brief excerpt from Acts 15. Peter was prominent in the early days of the church and her rapid expansion in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas.

Where the early years of Peter's ministry were plagued with missteps and blunders and denials, these last years are characterized by boldness and much fruit.

Peter's ministry was more fruitful after Jesus left than before. While amazing, it should be expected. Peter was a learner while Jesus was teaching him for three years of discipleship. Jesus had also promised in John 14:12 that His disciples would do the same thing He did and even greater works than these because Jesus goes to the Father.

Jesus going to the Father meant the Holy Spirit would come and indwell Jesus' followers. They would have God living in and through them. Prayer would also be a key element of power for Jesus' disciples. Jesus said His disciples would ask anything in His Name, and it would be given to them. Peter would be the recipient of this promise and power. The scope of Peter's work would extend beyond the geographical scope of Jesus' earthly ministry. In the same way, the scope of mission advancement among the nations has extended beyond the reach of the first century church and Paul's missionary journey.

You guys 50 and beyond have more behind you than ahead of you for sure. Finish well. Take the lessons you have learned from your life and the lives of others and use those lessons to help you finish well. I have observed and read that for many people today, their 60's and 70's are the most fruitful years of work and ministry. I sure hope that is true for me. Moses saw the burning bush at 80 years old. His most fruitful years were from 80-120 years old. Most are not living to 120 these days, but the last quarter of our life can be our most fruitful. Moses died climbing. May it be true of all valiant warriors.

You guys who are younger make solid decisions today that will bear abundant fruit in the days ahead. Do not let the blunders and flaws of youth and inexperience shipwreck the rest of your life. See Jesus coming to you again and again offering you new opportunities for repentance and grace and fruit-bearing. Remember last week's lesson. *"Peter, do you love Me? Feed My sheep!"* The goal is discipleship. The mark is the Great Commission. Your value in the kingdom is connected to your obedience of making disciples.

The task seems so enormous that it seems impossible. The adage you eat an elephant one bite at a time is true in discipleship. Discipleship begins with your discipleship. It then leads to your discipling one, two, five, or 10 men. Over time and through the years it begins to multiply. You must launch these disciples to make disciples. It is the brilliance of Jesus' plan. It is also the difficulty of expanding ministry. So many never make it to the fruitful, abundant, and appointed ministry of multiplication. So many settle into the "my four and no more" mentality. It is possible to have long-term friendship relationships and have an ever-expanding network of new disciples.

Peter was prominent through the first 12 chapters and even into chapter 15 of the book of Acts. Certainly, the argument could be made Paul is more prominent in Acts. He is introduced briefly at Stephen's stoning in chapter seven. His conversion is detailed in chapter nine, but he is pretty much off the scene until chapter 13. Paul is center stage chapters 13-28 and then his epistles.

But Peter was critical to the beginning of the church and its initial growth explosion, the beginnings of the Gentile mission with the Acts 10 vision, and Cornelius. His leadership at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 was important.

Look at the book of Acts and see where Peter is mentioned. Consider his influence and impact on the movement of Christ.

Acts 1:12-16

*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, **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. These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. **At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said,** "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.*

Jesus had instructed the disciples to wait on the Holy Spirit. I am sure waiting for Peter had always been difficult. He was speaking before thinking. He was cutting off ears and such. He was acting before thinking. He was going to do something even if it was wrong. He was one who would say "we are wasting daylight." Peter had experienced some humbling events and personal encounters with Jesus after his denial of Jesus. All these failures and restorations seasoned him for this next season of life and ministry and leadership.

Peter had failed the watching and praying test in the Garden of Gethsemane. He now faces the test of waiting and praying in the Upper Room. It is apparent Peter was again the established leader by his speech in Acts 1:15. Peter had learned his lesson of moving forward without the direction of God. He had learned the lesson Jesus taught in John 15 that without Him you can do nothing.

Consider Peter leading in the waiting. How do great leaders understand timing, when to wait, and when to act? Consider how Peter might have acted differently earlier in his life. Why was it important for Peter and the others to wait? What were they waiting on? Do you think they knew exactly what they were waiting on? Could they have understood or expected what was coming in Acts 2?

What are you waiting for?

Acts 2:14-37

But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy. 'And I will grant wonders in the sky above And signs on the earth below, Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. 'The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood, Before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. 'And it shall be that everyone who

calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. “For David says of Him, ‘I saw the Lord always in my presence; For He is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken. ‘Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; Moreover my flesh also will live in hope; Because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, Nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. ‘You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of gladness with Your presence.’ “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. “And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. “Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. “For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’ “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. Acts 2:41

Peter preached what would be a long sermon in the number of words in the Scripture, but it was not that long in time. Peter, who had the foot in mouth disease, stands and begins to proclaim the message of salvation history. It was the most powerful message preached to date and maybe of all time. The message contained explanation, prophecy, the gospel, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, and a convicting conclusion, “this Jesus whom you crucified.”

The results were phenomenal. Their hearts were pierced, and they asked what shall we do? Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized.”

This is the pattern for believer’s baptism. We are to repent and then be baptized. Our baptism follows belief and repentance. This is the New Testament pattern for baptism. This is what we call believer’s baptism. It is a baptism that does not save us. People and churches who believe baptism is necessary for salvation are going to believe in a regenerational baptism. The thief on the cross dispels this idea. Salvation is by grace through faith and is a gift of God, not a result of works. Adding baptism to grace and faith would be considered works. Baptism is also after salvation and serves as a symbol or testimony of the spiritual salvation and Spirit baptism received at salvation (Romans 6:3). While baptism does not save a person, it is a very important testimony for the follower of Jesus. It was so important that we see 3,000 baptized in Acts 2 and 5,000 men baptized in Acts 4.

If you have never been baptized after your salvation by immersion as a sign or testimony, then you need to follow Christ in believer’s baptism. Let someone know of your desire to be baptized. We believe, along with multitudes through 2,000 years of church history, baptism is an ordinance given to the church to be celebrated and practiced in the context of the gathered local church.

Discuss the elements of this message Peter preached at Pentecost. Discuss the impact of this message. What do you think was the key to 3,000 people being saved and baptized on that day?

What were some keys to Peter being able to do what he did on that day?

Discuss the importance and prominence of baptism on that day and today. Answer any questions anyone might have about believer's baptism. Enlist the help of a church staff member if you need clarification in your group. Identify any man who wants to share his need and desire to be baptized.

Acts 3:1-10

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us!" And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

In that day, like our day, beggars and people with mental and physical ailments find themselves in big cities on the streets. Often, these people are in close proximity to a church or place of worship. Peter and James were on the way to the temple for worship when they came across this lame beggar. Peter noticed the man and reached out to the man. God had given Peter the power to heal this man. In the Name of Jesus, this man could now walk. The man was looking for some coins as a beggar. God gave him something better. Peter did not have silver or gold, which is what the beggar wanted. God would give this man healing physically, and we certainly hope he received spiritual healing and salvation.

Discuss Peter's sensitivity to the lame man and the power God had given to Peter.

Peter said he did not have what the man was looking for. What did Peter offer this man? Discuss times you were looking for one thing and God provided something totally different that was so much better.

Consider the rapid change in Peter's spiritual leadership status in just a few days. He was the shamed denier of Christ and now he is a powerful instrument for the sake of the Lord.

How does Peter go from denying Christ to being used by God in such a powerful way?

Acts 3:11-26

While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. **But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His**

servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. "But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. "And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. **"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;** and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. "Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. 'And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. "It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' "For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."

Acts 4:1-4

As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening. **But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.**

Peter again preaches to a gathered crowd of people. He preaches in a way that connects the power of healing this lame man to Jesus. He also connects Jesus' death to their responsibility. He said, "But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses."

We are in a cycle of the movement of God and the participation of His followers. The movement is underway as now 8,000 numbered people had been saved and baptized. The people prayed in Acts 1. God sent the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. Peter preached in Acts 2. God saved 3,000 people in Acts 2. The people gathered for the word, prayer, and fellowship in Acts 2. God heals a lame beggar in Acts 3. Peter preaches in Acts 3-4. God saves 5,000 men in Acts 4. The apostles and the people select deacons to serve the church in Acts 6. God causes the Word of God to grow rapidly in Acts 6.

Discuss the movement of God in the book of Acts. What does God do? What do the people do?

Discuss the role of preaching in the launching of this expanding church growth in the early chapters of Acts.

Discuss movements of God in terms of God's sovereignty and man's activity and how they are interconnected. What constitutes a movement of God?

Acts 4:5-20

On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" **Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said** to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, **that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health.** "He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. **"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."** Now as **they observed the confidence of Peter** and John and understood that they were **uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.** And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. "But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name." And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. **But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."**

The impact of the healing of the lame beggar continues in chapter four. Peter again preaches Jesus to the people. Peter clarifies the singular necessity of trusting in Jesus in Acts 4:12. People observed the confidence of Peter in what he said. They also observed he had been with Jesus. From the observer's perspective, they were untrained and uneducated men. They obviously had been trained by Jesus. Despite the command to not talk anymore about Jesus, Peter, along with John, answered them that they would obey God and would have to speak about what they have seen and heard.

Discuss the boldness of Peter in Acts 4:13. What are some observable characteristics of a person who has boldness in the Spirit?

Discuss how they understood them to be untrained and uneducated men. Consider it is incorrect that they were untrained since they spent three years in Jesus' personal discipleship ministry.

Discuss the importance "they had been with Jesus." What does that mean? How could they tell?

Discuss the compelling call upon Peter in Acts 4:19-20.

Acts 5:1-11

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. **But Peter said,** "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out,

they buried him. Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. **And Peter responded** to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price." **Then Peter said to her**, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well." And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

The church faces a case of dishonesty and lying. The lying was to the Holy Spirit and to the church. Ananias and Saphira had sold some property and had lied about how much of the money they had given to the church. They evidently wanted to impress other people even if they had to lie about it. This passage states they lied to God and they lied to the Holy Spirit. This is one passage that attests to the deity of the Holy Spirit. This passage mostly attests to the sinfulness of people even in the church. It also emphasizes the importance of purity in the church, especially in the early stages of church birth and growth.

God killed Ananias and Saphira for their lying. Peter was the spokesperson directing and questioning them. He must have understood and known what God was going to do, especially in the case of Saphira after seeing what God had done to Ananias. It should be noted the result was that fear came upon the church, but as we will see in the subsequent chapter, the purified church would continue to expand.

Discuss the severity of the punishment for Ananias and Saphira. Consider why we do not see the severity of God's judgment on churches today? Or do we? (In light of churches embracing unbiblical doctrine of LGBTQ+ ideology, substituting/elevating less important issues into Gospel issues— social justice, climate change, etc.— apathy and indifference, etc.)

Discuss the importance of starting out right and the impact of mistakes or sin early in a movement.

Acts 5:29-32

But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Peter's message is consistent. His obedience and allegiance are to God over man. He also takes advantage of every opportunity to speak of Jesus' crucifixion and His exaltation in resurrection.

Acts 10:1-48

Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually. About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!" And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God. "**Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter; he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea.**" When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants, and after he had explained everything to them, he sent

them to Joppa. **On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." Again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.** Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon's house, appeared at the gate; and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there. **While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself."** Peter went down to the men and said, "Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?" They said, "Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you." So he invited them in and gave them lodging. Peter at Caesarea And on the next day he got up and went away with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man." As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled. And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. "That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me." Cornelius said, "Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, and he said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 'Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.' "So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord." Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)— you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. "We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. "God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. "And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

This is a lengthy passage that is very important in God taking the gospel to the Gentiles. Remember the word "Gentile" in the New Testament is the word "ethna." This word means "nations." So, Peter is leading the way in taking the gospel to the nations. Peter is known as the apostle to the Jews, and Paul is known as the apostle to the Gentiles (nations). Peter was responsible for taking the gospel to the Jews and establishing the church. But Peter was very important in the gospel spreading to the Gentiles. Throughout biblical history, God has always included people from outside the nation of Israel. We see that with Rahab the Canaanite prostitute and Ruth the Moabite both mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-16). Peter also demonstrates his leadership and support of Paul's missionary work at the Jerusalem Council in the spread of the gospel into Gentile territory.

God gave Cornelius, a Gentile, a vision about bringing Simon Peter to Caesarea. God also gave Simon Peter a vision of a sheet with all kinds of unclean animals. God told Peter to eat. Peter objected because being a good Jew, he had never eaten unclean animals. God instructed Peter to not call unclean what God called clean. God then told him about the messengers coming from Cornelius and he should go with him. Peter went to Caesarea and preached to Cornelius and the Holy Spirit came upon them. The text states "All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also." Peter then ordered them to be baptized.

Discuss the challenges of moving into new harvest fields and new places to share the gospel. Discuss some of the things Peter had to overcome or change for him to go to Cornelius' house to preach the gospel. How does that relate to you making changes in your life and attitude to get the gospel to the least reached areas of the world?

Considering the fact if you are not a Jew then you are a Gentile, discuss the right posture and practice of the local church in regards to taking the gospel to the nations.

Acts 11:1-4

Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying...

Peter received criticism from Jewish believers for eating with uncircumcised men.

Consider and discuss that sometimes the greatest criticism in reaching the nations comes from within the body. Why is that the case? Consider whether you are an asset or a hindrance to the gospel going out to the nations from our local church.

Acts 12:1-17

Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." And he went out and continued to follow, and he did

not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel." But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place.

Life did not get easier for Peter. As persecution increased, Peter was put in jail. Fervent prayer was offered on his behalf by the saints. An angel came and set Peter free. Upon his angelic release, he went to the house of Mary where many were gathered praying. When he knocked on the door and the servant girl reported that it was Peter, the people did not believe her. Finally, after his persistent knocking they let him in and were amazed.

Discuss their amazement that God had answered their prayer. Do we not see or not ask and miss out on answered prayer?

Acts 15:6-12

The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. **After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them,** "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are." All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

As the gospel spread to the nations, people who were not circumcised, who ate unclean foods, who ate food sacrificed to idols, and people with unusual customs and behaviors relative to the Jewish customs were coming to faith in Christ. Remember, these Jewish believers were under persecution for leaving Judaism to follow Jesus as Messiah. Now they are faced with people who are different than them. It requires a boiling down to the essentials of the gospel and the matters of fellowship and partnership. Peter steps up and leads to a solution in moving forward that emphasizes the centrality of the gospel and faith alone in Christ alone without adding anything else. He affirmed the work of God through Paul and Barnabas. They did work together to accommodate some of the feelings of the Jewish believers in regards to meat sacrificed to idols, from blood and things strangled, and fornication.

Peter went on to write 1 Peter and 2 Peter. These epistles have dominant themes of hope and suffering along with hope in Jesus' return.

As we look back on the last fruitful part of Peter's life, we find a multitude of leadership lessons.

Leaders lead.

Leaders lead with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Leaders are firm and bold in their convictions.

Leaders are passionate about the mission.

Leaders bring people together for the sake of the mission.

Leaders change their minds and embrace new ideas.

Leaders are courageous.

Leaders have experienced restoration.

Leaders depend on prayer and the Holy Spirit.

Discuss these leadership lessons and add to this list.

We have come to the conclusion of our Valiant Warrior study of Simon Peter. What we find in this last study is Peter's end of life was so much more fruitful than the beginning of life or the early years. Peter experienced a lot of life in his early years. A lot of it was filled with flaws and blunders. Peter learned from his mistakes based on how he finished. Finishing a race is what determines the winner. Finishing the game is what determines the victor. The same is true about finishing a life.

I am going to lift three paragraphs from our introduction as the conclusion of this study. I hope and pray you have been blessed and transformed by God's Word and God's men in these six weeks.

You guys who are younger, make solid decisions today that will bear abundant fruit in the days ahead. Do not let the blunders and flaws of youth and inexperience shipwreck the rest of your life. See Jesus coming to you again and again offering you new opportunities for repentance and grace and fruit-bearing. Remember last week's lesson. "Peter, do you love Me? Feed My sheep!" The goal is discipleship. The mark is the Great Commission. Your contribution in the kingdom is connected to your obedience of making disciples.

The task seems so enormous that it seems impossible. The adage you eat an elephant one bite at a time is true in discipleship. Discipleship begins with your discipleship. It then leads to your discipling one, two, five, or 10 men. Over time and through the years it begins to multiply. You must launch these disciples to make disciples. It is the brilliance of Jesus' plan. It is also the difficulty of expanding ministry. So many never make it to the fruitful, abundant, and appointed ministry of multiplication. So many settle into the "my four and no more" mentality. It is possible to have both long-term friendship relationships and have an ever-expanding network of new disciples.

You guys 50 and beyond have more behind you than ahead of you for sure. Finish well. Take the lessons you have learned from your life and the lives of others and use those lessons to help you finish well. I have observed and read that for many people today, their 60's and 70's are the most fruitful years of work and ministry. I sure hope that is true for me. Moses saw the burning bush at 80 years old. His most fruitful years were from 80-120 years old. Most are not living to 120 these days, but the last quarter of our life can be our most fruitful. Moses died climbing. So did Simon Peter. May it be true of all valiant warriors.

The Lord is with you, O Valiant Warrior. Judges 6:12

Grace and peace,
Wes