

Bravado, denial and second chances: following Jesus in the footsteps of Peter

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Simon Peter has always been someone I would love to have dinner with. Or go fishing with. We get such an unusually full portrait of the man, from his initial encounter with Jesus by the Sea of Galilee, to the heights of the Transfiguration, to the depths of his denial of Jesus at his trial. He shows us what it means to follow Jesus, and we see it all: the moments of elation, doubt and repentance. Through the snapshots of his life we get throughout the New Testament, we get a glimpse of what a thoroughly Spirit-transformed life can look like.

Scripture taken from The Holy Bible: NIV 2011

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
1	<p>When [Jesus] had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.'</p> <p>Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.'</p> <p>When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.</p> <p>When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!'</p>	Luke 5:4-8	<p>What was Simon Peter thinking when Jesus – the carpenter-turned-rabbi – tells him, the fisherman, to go out fishing again? Is there a sigh of resignation in his response? Perhaps. But Peter has been listening to Jesus teach, and from that at least he is convinced that Jesus is worth listening to. But this polite willingness quickly turns to existential horror when he encounters a presence far greater than himself.</p> <p>Are there any areas in your life where you, the 'professional', might need to be willing to hear the Master calling for a change of approach?</p>	<p>Father God,</p> <p>Help to recognise my need for your help and grace, even in the areas of life I feel I know best.</p> <p>Amen</p>
2	<p>Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.' So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.</p>	Luke 5:10b-11	<p>What if Jesus came and asked you to leave everything you know? Peter's first steps of discipleship are not blind faith: he knows that in this teacher God is at work, that perhaps all he had hoped for from God might be fulfilled. But he hasn't seen much yet.</p> <p>Faith is a step forward into the unknown, based on what we do know. Peter doesn't have all the answers yet, but he knows enough.</p>	<p>Father God,</p> <p>Give us willing hearts and minds to follow you wherever you may lead us.</p> <p>Amen</p>

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3	<p>Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.</p> <p>Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter).</p>	John 1:40-42	<p>Andrew's first instinct after encountering Jesus is to introduce him to his brother. US pastor Erwin McManus calls this initial infectious enthusiasm about Christ the 'barbarian way' – too often tamed by church life and our self-consciousness. But Andrew's introduction transforms Simon's life and even his name: now he is Peter, 'the rock'. It's an ironic choice in some ways, considering how things unfold for Peter, but it is Jesus' habit to give us a name and a status far beyond what we earn.</p> <p>What name and status have you earned? Be honest.</p>	<p>Lord,</p> <p>By your Spirit fill me with the boldness and clear-sightedness of Andrew. May I be so energized by your love that I cannot help but share you with others.</p> <p>Amen</p>
4	<p>When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'</p> <p>They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'</p> <p>'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?'</p> <p>Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'</p>	Matthew 16:13-16	<p>Jesus' identity has always been a live question. So often we put Jesus in boxes of our own creation: we condemn him with faint praise as a 'wise teacher', or let him gather dust on the mantelpiece with the line-up of 'great religious leaders.'</p> <p>But Peter sees clearly that Jesus is far more. He sees that this humble but compelling man is fulfilling the promises of God, and more – that in this man you encounter the very presence of God.</p> <p>Let's not sell Jesus short by failing to recognise who he really is. Do you ever do this?</p>	<p>Father God,</p> <p>Give us your spirit of understanding and wisdom that we can truly see Jesus, and welcome him into our lives in all his truth and glory.</p> <p>Amen</p>

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Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
5	<p>Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.'</p>	Matthew 16:17-18	<p>The truth is that knowing God requires power from outside ourselves – we need God to reveal himself to us by his Spirit. But here in Matthew's account of Simon's new name, we discover that his name comes with a calling. He is to be a key leader in the new community that Jesus has come to gather. But there is promise, too: Christ's church, despite the all-too-human failings of the people called to lead it, will never be overcome by 'the gates of Hades' – the imprisoning power of death itself.</p>	<p>Lord, Thank you that you are a God who reveals yourself. May our spiritual eyes be opened to your truth and calling in our lives. Amen</p>
6	<p>He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.</p> <p>But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'</p>	Mark 8:31-33	<p>Peter has moments of glory often closely followed by disasters – perhaps he is not alone in that. His problem is that he is looking at Jesus with a short-sighted, short-term lens. He's fiddling with the threads and missing God's tapestry.</p> <p>It's hard to remember that God is God, not us. Have you been tempted to rebuke God lately?</p>	<p>Father God, May our hearts break for what breaks yours, and may we passionately love what you love. Help us be concerned with your concerns. Amen</p>
7	<p>From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.</p> <p>'You do not want to leave too, do you?' Jesus asked the Twelve.</p> <p>Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.'</p>	John 6:66-69	<p>Following Jesus in a world where so many disregard his claims is not easy. So often, we find ourselves echoing the distraught father from Mark 9:24: 'I do believe, help me overcome my belief!' But Peter is marked by a deep conviction that he cannot shake: his encounter with Christ has left him convinced.</p> <p>What about Jesus' life or teaching is your bedrock in times of doubt?</p>	<p>Loving Creator, May we not be discouraged and continually return to the source of eternal life, Jesus himself. Amen</p>

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8	<p>After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.</p> <p>Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)</p> <p>Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’</p>	Mark 9:2-7	<p>Peter, James and John get a glimpse of the glory of Christ and Peter has no idea what to do – so he gets practical. It’s such a human reaction, and usually quite a good idea: when things are out of control, you do something practical to remind yourself of your own agency – to <i>just do something</i>. But there are moments – and this was definitely one of them – when we are afraid and bewildered and God simply wants us to stop and listen to Jesus.</p> <p>When are you most tempted to “do something” instead of stopping and listening?</p>	<p>Father God,</p> <p>Teach us to care and not to care,</p> <p>Teach us to sit still.</p> <p>May our faces be changed by the dazzling face of the glorious Christ.</p> <p>Amen</p>
9	<p>He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’</p> <p>Jesus replied, ‘You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’</p> <p>‘No,’ said Peter, ‘you shall never wash my feet.’</p> <p>Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.’</p> <p>‘Then, Lord,’ Simon Peter replied, ‘not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!’</p>	John 13:6-9	<p>Peter’s heart is in the right place: the thought of his Messiah stooping to wash his feet horrifies him because he is zealous to honour Christ. But it is a misguided zeal – in fact he fails to understand what is at the centre of Jesus’ work: serving and redeeming. But, like everything Peter does, his repentance is whole-hearted too.</p> <p>Christians love to serve – we are often less good at receiving service.</p> <p>How can you practice receiving Jesus’ service today?</p>	<p>Father God,</p> <p>Help us to understand your purposes for us. In our zeal to serve you, may we not misunderstand your ways. Help us to serve one another, and let us allow others to be our servants too.</p> <p>Amen</p>

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Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
10	<p>'You will all fall away,' Jesus told them, 'for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."</p> <p>But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.'</p> <p>Peter declared, 'Even if all fall away, I will not.'</p> <p>'Truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'today – yes, tonight – before the cock crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.'</p> <p>But Peter insisted emphatically, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' And all the others said the same.</p>	Mark 14:27-31	<p>Jesus has a strong but often-neglected emphasis on clear, sensible speech. Let your yes be yes, and your no be no. The Scriptures warn us: the tongue can be the spark that sets a forest ablaze. Peter still hasn't got this, and his bravado comes unstuck very quickly (as we shall see). Jesus is challenging us to be realistic about our rash claims about our abilities.</p> <p>When have you been like Peter and spoken too quickly?</p>	<p>Father,</p> <p>Help us to serve you in your power and not in our own. Help us to consider ourselves with sober judgement.</p> <p>Amen</p>
11	<p>A little later someone else saw him and said, 'You also are one of them.'</p> <p>'Man, I am not!' Peter replied.</p> <p>About an hour later another asserted, 'Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.'</p> <p>Peter replied, 'Man, I don't know what you're talking about!' Just as he was speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: 'Before the cock crows today, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly.</p>	Luke 22:58-62	<p>What's the shortest amount of time you've ever had between a vow and its breaking? For Peter, it was a matter of hours. His betrayal of Christ is different to Judas' – it is not calculating or spiteful – but it is still a tragedy.</p> <p>But this is not the end of the story for Peter.</p>	<p>Lord,</p> <p>We need your mercies every hour. We ask that you would preserve us from falling, but that if we do, help us to turn back and strengthen our brothers and sisters.</p> <p>Amen</p>

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12	<p>It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.</p>	Luke 24:10-12	<p>The word Luke uses for ‘nonsense’ here only appears once in the New Testament: it was a term that doctors would use for the delirious ramblings of very ill people. Despite everything Jesus had said about himself (Luke 18:33, John 11:25), no one expected a resurrection. No one thought the story could continue in such a dramatic way. But Peter, in the midst of the darkness, is still open to the possibility of hope. Maybe, just maybe, he thinks.</p> <p>What would you have thought if you had been at the tomb with Peter?</p>	<p>Risen Lord,</p> <p>This resurrection is delightful nonsense.</p> <p>Please may your risen life challenge and change us in every way.</p> <p>Amen</p>
13	<p>Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus.</p> <p>He called out to them, ‘Friends, haven’t you any fish?’</p> <p>‘No,’ they answered.</p> <p>He said, ‘Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.’ When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.</p> <p>Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, ‘It is the Lord,’ he wrapped his outer garment round him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.</p>	John 21:4-7	<p>Jesus’ reappearance on the beach cuts through all the post-resurrection puzzlement. And among the chaos of shocked fishermen, 153 flapping fish and nets fit to burst is one man so eager to get back to Jesus that he dives into the water, fully clothed, to reach him. For all Peter’s failings, he knows, still, that there is only one place to go.</p> <p>Do you know the same thing?</p>	<p>Father God,</p> <p>May we seek you with same passion that Peter did. Despite everything, he knew he just needed to be close to Jesus.</p> <p>Amen</p>

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14	<p>The third time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’</p> <p>Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ He said, ‘Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.’</p> <p>Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.’ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, ‘Follow me!’</p>	John 21:17-19	<p>There is a church in Vancouver, Canada called St Peter’s Fireside. It is named after Peter’s two fireside encounters with Jesus: the one in the high priest’s courtyard where Peter denies Jesus and the one on the beach when Jesus restores him. The fireside stories, so carefully told by John, encapsulate the beauty of the gospel in such an intimate way. Jesus is here to restore self-seeking, cowardly, broken people and commission them to be a part of his reconciling ministry. Peter knew this from his earliest days with Jesus in Galilee. And it is as true today as it ever was.</p> <p>Which fireside story do you identify with the most?</p>	<p>Father,</p> <p>May we, like Peter, see you in all your grace and know your restoring power.</p> <p>Help us to follow us wherever you would take us.</p> <p>Amen</p>