



## Peter as a Model Disciple

“I sure do identify with the Apostle Peter in the New Testament” many Christians have been heard to say. There are reasons why this is not an accident or coincidence. God has given us Peter as a model of a typical disciple. Disciples today can learn and be encouraged from his example.

### Peter's Prominence

No apostle in the Gospel accounts is given as much coverage as Peter. This prominence is intentional.

1. *He is always listed first.* In the three lists of the twelve disciples (Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16), Peter is at the head.

2. *He is the spokesman for the disciples.* What Peter says usually represents the consensus of the twelve disciples' opinions about Jesus and His teaching (e.g., Matt. 16:15-16; 17:24; Mark 8:29; 16:7; Luke 9:20; 12:41; John 6:67-69). It is as if Peter says what the others are thinking. In the same way, many Christians today admit that Peter echoes their thoughts. Peter is presented as the leader of the group, a position that he maintains in the early church described in the book of Acts.

3. *He was one of Jesus' inner three.* Along with James and John, Peter is privy to the most private conversations and experiences of the Lord Jesus (e.g., Matt. 17:1; 26:37; Mark 9:2; 14:33; Luke 9:28). Many of these experiences serve as lessons in discipleship.

4. *His experiences trace those of a typical disciple.* Of all the apostles, Peter has the greatest range of experiences. We see his first encounter with Christ (John 1), his call to discipleship (Matt. 4/Mark 1), his lessons in obedience and faith (Luke 5), his failure (Luke 22; John 13, 18), his restoration (John 21), and his commission into ministry (John 21). Peter usually initiates or is the central recipient of Jesus' discussions about discipleship's conditions and rewards (e.g., Matt. 16:24-28/Mark 8:34-38/Luke 9:23-27; 14:25-33; Matt. 19:27-30/Mark 10:28-31)

### Peter's Principles

As the typical disciple, we learn many lessons about discipleship from Peter's example. In the episodes that convey these lessons, the terminology of discipleship is prominent or implied. When we look at the Gospels' episodes of Peter's life that mention or imply *following* in discipleship, we find these lessons:

1. *Disciples should have a vision of what they can become.* John 1:40-42. Peter is only a seeker of truth when Jesus indicates at their first encounter that Peter has a solid future as one of His disciples. Jesus said Peter would be called a *Cephas*, or “rock.” Jesus expects a transformation from their association. Disciples and disciplers should begin the discipleship process with the end in mind. That end is to become firmly established in Christlikeness (Matt. 10:25).

2. *Disciples should adopt a life purpose of evangelism.* Matt. 4:18-22/Mark 1:14-20. This episode is different from the account in John 1. Peter evidently had believed in and had some familiarity with Jesus, but has not adopted His life purpose because he is seen still working at his old profession of fishing. Jesus said that He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10) and to preach the gospel (Mark 1:38).



Peter accepts Jesus' invitation to become a fisher of men also. In becoming like the Master, disciples must submit to His purpose of living to reach the lost.

3. *Disciples should learn to trust and obey the Lord.* Luke 5:1-11. Though there is a similar setting of fishing, the details show that this also is a different account from the one in Matthew 4/Mark 1. Peter is still engaged somewhat in his old life--fishing for fish, not men. As such, he is not totally submitted to Jesus' call and purpose for his life. When Peter learns to obey, he is blessed with success. He is also willing to leave *everything* this time. Disciples are only useful and fruitful when obedient. Disciples must learn that God especially blesses when we obey Him in the purpose of evangelism.

4. *Disciples should put God's will first no matter the cost.* Matt. 16:24-28/Mark 8:34-38/Luke 9:23-27; 14:25-33. Peter and the other disciples are the recipients of Christ's conditions for discipleship. But these conditions follow Peter's confession about who Christ is and Christ's revelation of His suffering and death. Now that Jesus has told them what it will cost Him to submit to God's will, He tells the disciples what it will mean to follow His will. They will need to pay a price. A disciple must lose his life in order to find it. There is a cost to discipleship, but there is also a reward.

5. *Disciples should let failure and restoration teach them about God's grace.* John 13:36-38; 18:15-27; 21:15-23. Peter's discipleship is interrupted by failure when he denies Christ on the night of His arrest. He still follows Jesus to a degree, but from a distance. Jesus had predicted this lapse of Peter's faith but also his restoration (Lk 22:31-34). Jesus knew that Peter would return to Him and be used to strengthen others. Peter failed because of pride and presumption. Disciples will fail at times, but must view failure as a detour, not a cul-de-sac, in their overall journey. They must see that God can use their failures to strengthen others in their spiritual journeys.

6. *Disciples should serve God in their own unique ministry.* John 21:15-23. Peter's restoration is indicated by Christ's three-fold question "Peter, do you love Me?" Jesus helps Peter focus on the one indispensable qualification for ministry to others--love for Jesus. Peter is again told to follow, but when this evokes a question from him about John's future, Peter is told in essence, "Don't worry about him, you follow Me." Jesus is teaching Peter not to compare but to focus on his own unique ministry. Disciples must be taught to focus on their own unique ministry according to their particular gifts and calling.

## **Conclusion.**

Peter's story shows the journey of a typical disciple. It teaches us that discipleship is not a static state, but a dynamic journey. A disciple is always challenged to be more of a disciple. Christ's demands following our conversion go from general to more specific. Each call to follow involves more significance, a deeper commitment, and a greater sacrifice. Discipleship is a direction and an orientation as we progressively follow Jesus Christ as Master.