

Call and Growth

Devotional Reading: Colossians 2:1–7

Background Scripture: John 1:40–42; Ephesians 4:11–16;
Philippians 3:12–16; Colossians 1:9–11; Hebrews 6:1–3

Matthew 4:18–20

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

Matthew 16:16–18

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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.”

John 21:15–18

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

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.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ 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.”

2 Peter 3:14–15, 18

¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Key Text

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.” —John 21:17

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 2: Grace and Reconciliation

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List significant events in the life of Peter after Jesus called him.
2. State why Jesus might have continued to express confidence in Peter despite his shortcomings and weaknesses.
3. Write a note encouraging another believer who wants to grow in faith.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. From Fisherman to Disciple
- B. Lesson Context

I. Peter's Call (Matthew 4:18–20)

- A. Two Fishermen (v. 18)
- B. One Mission (vv. 19–20)

II. Peter's Proclamation (Matthew 16:16–18)

- A. Recognized the Son (v. 16)
- B. Revealed by the Father (vv. 17–18)

III. Peter's Ministry (John 21:15–18)

- A. One Question, Repeated (vv. 15–17)
Demonstration of Love
- B. One Future, Predicted (v. 18)

IV. Peter's Teaching (2 Peter 3:14–15, 18)

- A. Living at Peace (vv. 14–15)
- B. Growing in Grace (v. 18)
Free Time for French

Conclusion

- A. The Journey of Discipleship
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. From Fisherman to Disciple

In 1986, a severe drought lowered the water level of the Sea of Galilee, resulting in shorelines once covered in water becoming visible. On its western shores, two brothers discovered the remains of a once-buried fishing boat. Informally dubbed the “Jesus Boat,” the vessel is about 27 feet long and 7 feet wide. Researchers have dated it to within approximately 100 years of the life of Jesus, causing many to hypothesize that it could be the type of boat used by first-century fishermen.

Today's lesson explores the life, call, and ministry of one such first-century fisherman, Simon Peter. He left the waters (and fishing boats) of the Sea of Galilee to become a disciple of Jesus. Peter's discipleship to Jesus was full of ups and downs, yet God used Peter to ensure the growth and spread of the first-century church.

B. Lesson Context

Simon Peter was from Bethsaida (John 1:44), a village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Here, he worked as a fisherman with his brother Andrew (Mark 1:16). Their fishing operation was a partnership with James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Luke 5:10). Peter was married (Mark 1:30; 1 Corinthians 9:5). At some point, Peter, his wife, and at least one other family member moved to Capernaum (Matthew 8:5–14), a town approximately five miles southwest of Bethsaida.

The New Testament notes three names for Peter. His Hebrew name is *Simon* or the variant *Simeon* (Mark 1:16; Acts 15:14). Later, Jesus calls him *Peter*, a designation based on an ancient Greek word meaning “rock” or “stone” (Matthew 16:18; Mark 3:16); this is his most frequently occurring name in the New Testament, found over 160 times. The third name is *Cephas*, an Aramaic word for “stone” (John 1:42; 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; etc.).

I. Peter's Call

(Matthew 4:18–20)

A. Two Fishermen (v. 18)

18. As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of

Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

The *Sea of Galilee* is a large freshwater lake in the northern region of Palestine. The New Testament gives two other names for this body of water: “the Lake of Gennesaret” (Luke 5:1) and “the Sea of Tiberias” (John 6:1). It was the location of a significant fishing industry. Regarding the designation *Simon called Peter* and his involvement in that industry, see the Lesson Context, above.

Jesus is living in Capernaum at this time (Matthew 4:13). That town is located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, so his *walking by the Sea* is unsurprising.

B. One Mission (vv. 19–20)
19–20. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

Jesus’ call seems abrupt. Why would these fishermen drop *their nets* immediately for *Jesus*? We should note that at this time, Jesus was not unknown to the two brothers. During Andrew’s time as a disciple of John the Baptist, Andrew encountered Jesus; after that, Andrew told Simon, “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41).

Jesus’ command to *follow me* is not simply an invitation to join his walk along the shore. Instead, it is a summons to become his student and disciple. This relationship is not initiated by the application of the would-be disciple but by the invitation of the master, as we see here.

As disciples of Jesus, the brothers will take on a new task: they will no longer be fishermen on the lake. Instead, they will *fish for people*, seeking others to become disciples of Jesus. Accepting Jesus’ call, therefore, requires a significant cost. Peter later says that he had “left everything” to follow Jesus (Matthew 19:27). The lives of these fishermen will never be the same again.

II. Peter’s Proclamation
(Matthew 16:16–18)

Jesus’ early ministry focuses on the region of

Galilee, where he ministers to crowds and faces testing from religious leaders (Matthew 15:29–16:4). These events form the backdrop of his teaching to the disciples (16:5–12). As this segment of our lesson opens, Jesus and the disciples have traveled to the region of Caesarea Philippi (16:13), about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

In this remote area, Jesus and the disciples experience a retreat-like atmosphere and relief from crowds. While there, Jesus asks the disciples, “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15). What comes next is Peter’s response.

What Do You Think?

In what ways has Jesus called you to follow and trust him in the upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

How can you follow that call at work, with your family, or in your neighborhood?

A. Recognized the Son (v. 16)
16a. Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah,

Simon Peter answers for the whole group. The title *Messiah* is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek title “Christ.” Both designations mean “the anointed one.” Numerous Old Testament texts point to the Messiah’s arrival and reign (Psalm 110; Isaiah 11; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 9:9; etc.). Many first-century Jews expect the Messiah to be a political figure chosen by God to save their nation, sit on the throne of David, and rule over an earthly empire. But Jesus will be a leader in God’s unique terms (compare John 6:15).

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to the question, “Who is Jesus to you?”

Digging Deeper

How will your answer to that question affect your daily living?

16b. “the Son of the living God.”
The second part of Peter’s confession reveals

why he believes that Jesus is fulfilling messianic expectations. Inherent in the two parts of Peter's confession is a recognition of both Jesus' power (the ability to do something) and authority (the right to do something) as God the Father confirms these (Matthew 3:17; 28:18; compare Luke 4:36).

B. Revealed by the Father (vv. 17–18)

17. 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.”

Peter is *blessed* for having recognized and acknowledged the identity and mission of *Jesus*, although Peter still misunderstands the nature of that mission (Matthew 16:21–22). The phrase *flesh and blood* contrasts created human beings with Jesus' uncreated *Father in heaven* as the source of Peter's awareness (compare Galatians 1:11–12).

Regarding the name *Simon*, see the Lesson Context. Putting it together with the designation *son of Jonah* results in a very formal address, emphasizing the importance of the situation.

18a. “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church,

The interpretation of this verse has been the subject of much discussion throughout church history. The main issue is to determine to whom or what *this rock* refers.

Theory 1: The rock is Jesus himself. Supporting this proposal is the fact that Jesus refers to himself as the chief cornerstone (Matthew 21:42). Peter himself acknowledges that fact (1 Peter 2:4–8). However, the word image in the text before us would be odd since Jesus would be referring to himself as both the church's foundation (*rock*) and its builder (*I will build*).

Theory 2: Peter himself is the rock. The word *Peter* is Greek for “rock” or “stone.” Thus, the idea is that Jesus is using a play on words. The book of Acts details Peter's leadership in the first-century church (Acts 2:14–41; 4:1–31; etc.). In this regard, Peter leadership is the “rock” on which the growth and expansion of the church was based (10:1–11:21).

Theory 3: Peter's confession is the rock. The Bible tells us that confessing Jesus as Savior and Lord is vital (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9; 1 John 4:15; etc.). After denying the Lord before the crucifixion, Peter “re-confessed” Christ (John 21:15–18, below).

The Greek word translated *church* occurs only here and in Matthew 18:17 in the four Gospels. Jesus himself is the one who inaugurates this community of God's people. They are to be committed to him. Jesus is and always will be the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22).

18b. “and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

The meaning of the word translated as *Hades* is tricky. The use of the word in Acts 2:31 seems to imply the general location of the dead, similar to the Hebrew word *Sheol* in the Old Testament, often translated “grave” (examples: Psalms 6:5; 89:48). Elsewhere in the New Testament, the word translated “Hades” refers to a place of torment as we usually think of this word—the destination of the wicked after they die (Luke 16:23). The phrase *the gates of Hades* refers to the domain and power of death. Even death itself cannot permanently hold back the community of God's people.

III. Peter's Ministry

(John 21:15–18)

Our next section of Scripture takes place following Jesus' resurrection. By this time in the post-resurrection timeline, Jesus has appeared to many of his disciples and followers (John 20:11–29). He appears again to seven disciples at the Sea of Galilee (21:2), directing them to a large catch of fish before inviting them to breakfast (21:12).

A. One Question, Repeated (vv. 15–17)

15a. When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

After breakfast, *Jesus* turns the meeting into an opportunity to teach. *Simon Peter* had previously boasted of his commitment and devotion to Jesus

(Matthew 26:33; Mark 14:29; Luke 22:33; John 13:37). He even resorted to violence to prove it (18:10). But his pledge of devotion proved to be bluster. Jesus' question probes Peter's heart and loyalties.

What does the word *these* refer to? Is it the boats and fishing equipment? Is it the other disciples? Or does it mean, "Do you love me more than these other disciples love me?" A definitive answer is impossible to glean from the text as written. We may conclude that Jesus means *these* as a general reference point: "Do you love me supremely, more than anything or anyone else?"

What Do You Think?

What are some "lesser loves" that can distract us from loving Jesus supremely?

Digging Deeper

What diagnostic questions can we ask to ensure these loves do not displace our love for Jesus?

15b. "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Peter assures Jesus of his *love*, even reminding the *Lord* that *you know* this fact. However, Jesus had correctly predicted that Peter's previous declarations of commitment would prove false (John 13:37–38).

15c. Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

As the Good Shepherd, *Jesus* has laid down his life (John 10:15). If Peter loves Jesus, he will lead in the same way, protecting and providing for the *lambs* who are God's people (compare 1 Peter 5:1–4).

16. Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

With only slight variation, the exchange is repeated. We imagine Peter is puzzled; he has already answered Jesus' question. But Peter does so once more.

17. The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" 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." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.

A third time, Jesus questions Peter's love. For Peter to feel *hurt* at this repetition is understandable. Does Jesus doubt his answer? Or is Peter's distress the result of seeing a connection between these three questions and his three denials of Jesus (John 18:15–18, 25–27)?

Peter's response includes an acknowledgment that not only does Jesus know Peter's inner thoughts, but Jesus also knows *all things*—a recognition of Jesus' deity (compare John 2:25).

Demonstration of Love

My husband and I had been dating for roughly six months before he said, "I love you." I'll never forget the inflection in his voice. We had been talking and laughing when it just seemed to come out of the blue!

His proclamation of love was a turning point in our relationship. It was not the same as our expressing how much we loved reading or eating ice cream. There was a particular weight to that phrase in the context of our budding relationship. Love for each other would require mutual action in terms of selflessness, work, and even sacrifice. Our love has lasted 20 years, but the weightiness of those three words remains.

It wasn't enough that Peter spoke of his love for Jesus; Peter needed to demonstrate it. He would

How to Say It

Aramaic	<i>Air-uh-may-ik.</i>
Bethsaida	<i>Beth-say-uh-duh.</i>
Caesarea Philippi	<i>Sess-uh-ree-uh</i> <i>Fih-lip-pie</i> or <i>Fil-ih-pie.</i>
Capernaum	<i>Kuh-per-nay-um.</i>
Eusebius	<i>You-see-be-us.</i>
Gennesaret	<i>Geh-ness-uh-ret</i> (<i>G</i> as in <i>get</i>).
Messianic	<i>Mess-ee-an-ick.</i>
Messiah	<i>Meh-sigh-uh.</i>
Palestine	<i>Pah-luh-stein.</i>
Sheol	<i>She-ol.</i>
Tiberias	<i>Tie-beer-ee-us.</i>
Zebedee	<i>Zeb-eh-dee.</i>

Are you
growing
in faith?



Visual for Lesson 8. Display this visual as you ask the discussion question associated with 2 Peter 3:18.

show this through his taking care of God's people. Peter's love for Jesus would fuel his life's mission as a leader of the first-century church. How does your love for Jesus motivate your actions? What does his love compel you to do? —B. R.

B. One Future, Predicted (v. 18)

18a. "Very truly I tell you,

The underlying Greek phrase translated *very truly* is characteristic of John's Gospel, occurring there more than two dozen times (and never in the other three Gospels). It emphasizes the absolute certainty of what is about to be said.

18b. "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 prophesies that the freedom of movement Peter enjoyed while young would someday be lost. One interpretation of the phrase *you will stretch out your hands* is that it refers to the practice of crucifixion. The phrase thus might allude to how Peter would meet his death. Tradition is unclear regarding that method. In about AD 90, the first-century church leader Clement of Rome states that Peter was martyred (1 Clement 5:2–4). Later tradition from the church historian Eusebius holds that Peter was crucified in Rome during the reign of Nero (AD 54–68). Regardless of the method of Peter's death, Jesus prom-

ised that the apostle would glorify God because of it (John 21:19).

IV. Peter's Teaching

(2 Peter 3:14–15, 18)

Some commentators believe that the apostle Peter composed the letter we call 2 Peter in Rome shortly before his death (compare 2 Peter 1:13–15). Therefore, the epistle serves as his final word to believers. If the word *Babylon* in 1 Peter 5:13 is a code word for Rome, this lends further support to his presence in that city.

A. Living at Peace (vv. 14–15)

14. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

We must back up a few verses to determine the antecedent of *this*. The answer is found in 2 Peter 3:12, where the word translated *looking forward to* here in verse 14 occurs again as "looking for," the object being "the day of God." While believers look *forward to this*, we must remain diligent in all aspects of our faith.

What Peter is saying is nothing new. The challenge to live *at peace* is also found in 1 Corinthians 7:15 and James 3:18. *Spotless* of impurity and *blameless* from sin are echoed together in 1 Timothy 6:14. Although nothing new, these imperatives bear repeating!

15. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

The *Lord's patience* refers to the delay of the bodily return of Jesus to bring judgment. The Lord is patient, "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Peter calls on the authority of *dear brother Paul* to emphasize the harmony of their teachings. We do not know the specific teaching by Paul that Peter has in mind. But we know that Paul wrote to believers in Rome regarding God's patience for salvation (Romans 2:4; 3:25; 9:22; etc.). He

also wrote regarding the need for righteous living in light of spiritual freedom (Galatians 5:1–26; etc.). Peter directs his readers to accept Paul’s teachings since the *wisdom* they contain has been given unto him by revelation from *God* (1:11–12; Ephesians 3:3).

B. Growing in Grace (v. 18)

18. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

The letter ends with words of exhortation and praise. The promise of Christ’s return impels us to use that certainty as a touchstone for how we are to live. *We grow in grace* as we react to God’s unmerited favor given through our faith in *our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (see 2 Peter 1:2).

An increase in the *knowledge* of him implies more than knowing facts—it includes a relationship with him as characterized by following his commands for righteous living (2 Peter 1:5–6; compare John 14:15). To be saved is a state of being justified; after that happens, what comes next is the lifelong process of sanctification.

Peter concludes with a doxology—a praise of, and attribution of *glory* to, Christ Jesus. By one count, there are more than a dozen doxologies in the New Testament (Ephesians 3:21; etc.).

I’m hopeful that it will help me focus on my studies. I’m using all my free time to learn French!

The letter of 2 Peter reminds us that we are responsible for our spiritual growth and maturity. Just as I face daily choices to study or not to study, we face daily choices regarding how we choose to live. Only by our personal decisions and the guidance of the Holy Spirit will we grow and mature in our Christian discipleship. What changes do you need to make to facilitate further growth? —B. R.

What Do You Think?

In what ways does Peter’s story of discipleship mirror your own?

Digging Deeper

How will you use your own discipleship story to invite others to join you on the journey of discipleship to Jesus?

Conclusion

A. The Journey of Discipleship

Peter’s life of discipleship took him from being a fisherman in Galilee to being a leader of the first-century church. He grew from being “unschooled” and “ordinary” (Acts 4:13) to being the author of the two letters that bear his name in the New Testament. But his growth process wasn’t a straight line that always trended upward! Neither will ours be.

Even so, Jesus calls all who would claim to be his disciples to grow in his grace and knowledge—there are no exceptions. Peter’s story is encouraging in that regard. And as we grow, we will find it natural to invite others to join us on this journey as well. Expect it!

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, give us a heart for transforming growth in your Son through your Holy Spirit! Forgive us for times when we fail you. Empower us to recognize opportunities to invite others to become your Son’s disciples as well. In his name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Discipleship is a journey of growth.

What Do You Think?

In which areas of life do you need to grow most in Christ as you await his return?

Digging Deeper

Who is another believer you can ask to support you in this endeavor?

Free Time for French

I am trying to learn to speak French, and I decided that the best (and most fun) way to learn would be through an app on my phone. While it has helped me study parts of the French language, I still have a long way to go before I am fluent.

To give myself more learning opportunities, I’ve made one significant change: I have reduced my social media usage. By removing this distraction,