

SESSION 1

PUT OUT INTO THE DEEP: THE MAKING OF AN APOSTLE

INTRODUCTION

Today we begin our study of St. Peter. In this session Dr. Gray will give an overview of Peter, touching on topics such as Peter's ordinary background and how this prepared him for his later role, the emphasis on St. Peter in the gospels and art, and Jesus' calling of Peter.

Peter's life appears, on the surface, to have been rather ordinary. He was a devout first-century Jew who spent his life as a fisherman, growing up in the village of Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea Galilee, and later moving west along that shore to the town of Capernaum. He was by no means especially wealthy, powerful, or socially well-connected. The story of such a man could very easily have gone unnoticed and forgotten by the passing of centuries. But one encounter, one act of trust, would entirely change the ordinary course of Peter's life. This once simple fisherman would become a disciple of Jesus Christ, head of the Apostles, spiritual father over Christ's Church, preacher to Jews and Gentiles both in his homeland and in the capital city of the empire, author of two letters of the Bible (1 & 2 Peter), and a martyr who would end his life on this earth giving the ultimate witness to his Lord's teaching and resurrection.

One goal of this first small group and video time is to give the participants a chance to get to know one another (if this is a new small group) or to reconnect with one another. The CONNECT questions that follow the Opening Prayer are a great way to accomplish this.



CONNECT

1. Introduce yourself to the group and share one or two things that most interest you about St. Peter.
Hopefully everyone in the group is here because they have an interest in the topic and person of Peter. Sharing a common interest is always a great way to connect to others, so give everyone a chance to share what most interests them about Peter.
2. What profession, hobby, or activity are you involved in? How did you learn it?
In today's session, participants will hear about how Jesus meets Peter right in the midst of his daily life, in the midst of his daily profession (fishing), on the shoreline of the town in which he lived and worked with his brother Andrew. Most often it is right in the middle of our work, family life, and activities where Jesus meets us. Peter learned his profession from a young age, and his skills with a boat would come in handy on the many journeys that Jesus and the Apostles made across the Sea of Galilee during Jesus' ministry. Oftentimes we don't realize until looking back over the months and years how God prepares us for a future call by leading us into the very ordinary interests of work and activities today.

3. Think of a time you trusted someone and the result was very good. How did that experience affect your relationship with that person?

Trust is the basis of any true friendship. Sometimes trust develops over time. Sometimes there is a need to trust someone early on, when there is no evidence that the other person is trustworthy, and whether the person proves trustworthy or not often determines the direction of the friendship/relationship. Peter will be asked to trust Jesus very shortly after meeting him, and the outcome of that encounter will put Peter on a trajectory that will change his life.



Play the video segment, which will last for approximately 45 minutes. The Study Guide provides participants with a brief outline of the topics covered in the video teaching.



DISCUSS

Following are suggested answers to the DISCUSS questions.

1. What are some of the reasons Dr. Gray gives for calling Peter a “model disciple”? How does God use Peter’s strengths—including trust—to build the Church? How does Peter persevere in spite of his weaknesses?
Peter trusts Jesus, and he chooses to leave everything and follow him. Peter remains close to Jesus, talking with and learning from Jesus. He also struggles and fails, being an imperfect man; but Peter’s humility continually leads him to repent and “weep bitterly for love”—turning back to Jesus and strengthening his brothers as the steward of Jesus’ household, the Church. Peter’s bold and childlike faith is a strength that will help him guide the Church and proclaim the Gospel. Peter’s humility, especially in the face of his failures, keeps Peter completely dependent upon God and produces in him the merciful love of the Father’s heart.
2. Peter, a devout Jew, grows up in the village of Bethsaida, in the midst of a very Gentile and Hellenistic culture. How did this prepare Peter for his future mission? How does God “equip the called”?
God never calls or sends out his people for mission without providing the tools they will need, thus equipping the called. The Hellenistic Greek culture was the culture of the Roman Empire, especially in the empire’s eastern half. Growing up as a devout Jew, Peter knew well the faith of the Jews—including the prophecies that would identify the long-awaited Messiah—thus preparing him to recognize and to follow Jesus. Growing up in the Hellenistic culture of Bethsaida, Peter would have also understood the secular language and topics of the day. The combination of both these backgrounds made Peter better able to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in language and terms easily understood by those he would preach to, both Jew and Gentile, from Pentecost to the end of his life.
3. What is one of the earmarks of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, according to Peter in Acts 1:21? As modern disciples of Jesus Christ, how do we live this out today?
In Acts 1:21-22, Peter says: “One of the men who have accompanied us during all the time [emphasis added] that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” The first earmark of a disciple is the amount of time spent with Jesus. In the first century this time was spent listening to and conversing with him (for us today, this is prayer), watching him (for us today, this is adoration), and honoring him (for us today, this is worship).

4. When Jesus called Peter to “put out into the deep,” he was calling Peter to trust him. Why is trust an important aspect in our lives of faith?

We can only have a superficial relationship with someone we don't or can't trust. God wants an intimate, personal relationship with each one of his children. We must trust God in order to enter into a genuine and intimate relationship with him.

5. What is one example from Peter's life that encourages you to become a more faithful disciple of Jesus?

Here are some possible examples:

Even though Peter denies Jesus three times, Jesus forgives him. This is such a witness of Jesus' desire to forgive our sins, and such an encouragement, that when I also fail and sin, I know that I too can turn to Jesus and repent (like Peter, who wept bitterly when he denied Christ), and I know that Jesus will forgive me too!

I like that Peter is an ordinary guy, and in the midst of his ordinary life with his family and work commitments and relationships, he is called by Jesus to follow him closely. It's an encouragement for me to follow Jesus closely in the midst of my ordinary work and family life.

6. Peter spent much time with Jesus, walking the hills of Galilee. Do you spend time with Jesus in prayer, worship, and adoration? What can you do to make time to incorporate or deepen these practices in your daily life?

Here are some examples: making a schedule that includes daily prayer time reading Scripture or praying the rosary, a weekly visit to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, making an increased effort to actively (not passively) participate in Mass, sacrificing some time on the weekends to read a book on some aspect of the faith or the life of a saint, etc.



COMMIT

Following are suggested answers to questions in the daily COMMIT reflections.

COMMIT DAY 1 – THE SEA OF GALILEE

Participants will learn about the Sea of Galilee and the surrounding area where Peter grew up and from which he drew his livelihood.

The lake goes by various names. Look up the following verses in the Bible. What names are given for this lake in the heart of Galilee?

John 6:1 – *Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiber'ias*

Numbers 34:11 – *Sea of Chin'nereth*

Luke 5:1 – *Lake of Gennes'aret*

The Sea of Galilee stands in stark contrast to the Holy Land's other great body of water, the Dead Sea. Locate these two bodies of water on the map. Note the relationship of the Jordan River to each body of water. One sea both receives and sends forth water, while one body sends forth none of the water it receives. What spiritual analogy can be drawn from the very different situations of these two bodies of water? *The Sea of Galilee receives the waters of the Jordan River on its north shore; it also sends out its waters to continue the Jordan River flowing south. While the Dead Sea receives the waters of the Jordan on its north shore, it never sends forth any water. These two bodies of water provide a wonderful analogy of the spiritual life. In the spiritual life we must both receive grace and the life of the Spirit and let that life flow out of us in an outpouring of good works and loving service to others if we are to truly be alive in Christ. If we don't let the life of God flow from us to others, that life will slowly die within us, just as fish and plants cannot live in the Dead Sea.*



COMMIT DAY 2 – WHY PETER?

Participants will consider the opening words of St. Peter's first letter and the significance of Peter throughout history. Then they will complete a first word-web activity to help organize what they already know about Peter, and then a second about themselves to better apply in their own life what they will learn from Peter.



COMMIT DAY 3 – INTO THE DEEP

Participants are walked through a Lectio and Meditatio on Luke 5:1-11, and then they answer questions to help them reflect on this passage of Scripture.

How does Peter first react to Jesus' instruction to "let down your nets for a catch"?

While Peter lets Jesus into his boat in order to teach the crowds, when Jesus instructs Peter to put his nets into the deep for a catch of fish, Peter's initial response is to protest: "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!" (Luke 5:5). He is trying to explain to Jesus, a rabbi likely with no fishing experience, that, based on their experience from the previous hours, the catch will very likely yield no fish.

Luke tells us that "the fishermen had gone out of [their boats] and were washing their nets." What does this tell us about the fishermen? Are they getting ready to fish? Or are they done fishing for the day?

How does this detail help us understand Peter's first reaction to Jesus' instruction?

Not only have the fishermen not caught anything from their evening toils; this added detail about "washing their nets" informs us that they have also put in all the necessary work to prepare for the next trip. Peter is confident that there are no fish to be caught at this time, and so, in Peter's mind, to "put out into the deep" now will not only result in an unsuccessful catch, but will require repeating much of the work of cleaning the nets. This detail helps us understand why Peter protests at first, and makes us realize that Peter's obedience to Jesus' instruction requires a sacrifice on Peter's part.

How does Peter react to Jesus after the miraculous catch of fish? Peter initially refers to Jesus as "Master" (v. 5). How does Peter refer to Jesus after the miraculous catch, and what does this reveal about what has changed in Peter?

Having heard Jesus' teaching and having just fished all night with no catch of fish, Peter immediately recognizes that this great catch of fish is a miracle, done at the hand of Jesus. Peter falls on his knees before Jesus, recognizing, as a devout Jew, that Jesus is no ordinary man, but must be, at least, a prophet of the Lord God, speaking and acting on God's behalf.

Having initially called Jesus "Master" (Luke 5:5), Peter now refers to Jesus as "Lord" (Luke 5:8), articulating in words what he bespeaks with his kneeling at Jesus' feet: that he is in the presence of a man of God. Being in Jesus' presence, Peter also feels deeply his own unworthiness, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man," to which Jesus responds, "Do not be afraid." Even with all Peter's weaknesses, it is this humility that Jesus will use as the beginning point of Peter's transformation into a fisher of men.

Imagine yourself in this scene. If you were in Peter's place, what would you have done? Would you even have let Jesus step into your boat? When Jesus tells you to cast your nets into the deep, would you tell him that it is useless to try? Would you trust him enough to actually cast your nets into the deep? In what areas of your life is Jesus calling you to trust him more?

Answers will vary per personal responses.

In response to the miraculous catch, Peter humbly recognizes his own sinfulness and falls at Jesus' feet. Jesus responds, "Do not be afraid." Why does Jesus respond with these words? What is Peter afraid of? What would we be afraid of if we were in Jesus' presence in this scene? What would we be afraid of if we were in Jesus' presence right now? Scripture records many times that God says to his people, "Do not be afraid." Some examples include: Genesis 15:1, Joshua 1:9, Isaiah 41:8-10, Luke 1:11-13, Luke 1:26-30. Why is this message so important? Why does God repeat these words so often to us?

While God often calls us to step out in faith, continually trusting in him is not always an easy task. When we would be tempted to no longer follow God's call, either because we recognize our own sinfulness or because the task ahead seems insurmountable, he speaks those words that dispel our anxiety and renew our peace: "Be not afraid," reminding us over and over to trust in him in the midst of the storms and trials of life. When Abram is alone in a strange land without an heir, or when Joshua must lead God's people in the Promised Land, fear at the impossible job ahead might prove a temptation to doubt and be unfaithful to God, but God reminds these men, and us through them, that he is with us at all times (Genesis 15:1, Joshua 1:9). In the presence of the angel of the Lord, both Zechariah and Mary would experience the right fear of a creature in the awesome presence of the representative of the Creator, but once again God speaks, "Be not afraid," expressing his love (Luke 1:13, 30). Some additional examples of God saying, "Do not be afraid" include Deuteronomy 31:6; Matthew 10:31; Mark 5:36; Luke 12:32; John 6:20; John 14:27; and 1 Peter 3:14-15.

Jesus calls Peter, James, and John apart from the other Apostles many times in the gospels (for examples, see Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 5:37-43, Mark 14:32-42). From reading Luke 5:9-10, what is the relationship between Peter, James, and John before they meet Jesus? How does this first relationship better prepare these three men as they follow Jesus and as he calls them closer to himself? How does God use relationships in your own life to call you into a deeper relationship with himself?

Luke 5:9-10 tells us, "For he [Peter] was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zeb'edee, who were partners with Simon." As partners, James and John work closely with Peter, likely becoming not only colleagues, but also friends. After choosing them as part of the Twelve, Jesus will often draw these three apart from the other Apostles. Thus, for example, Peter, James, and John are the only Apostles present at the Transfiguration. These three will be called to special tasks in the early Church: Peter will be the head of the Apostles, James will be the first martyr of the Apostles, and John will care for the Blessed Virgin Mary, along with writing his gospel, the book of Revelation, and letters. Their early friendship will not only provide support to one another, but will be a witness of unity in the Church.



COMMIT DAY 4 – SPENDING TIME WITH JESUS

Participants will reflect upon Acts 1:21-22 and consider an important earmark of being a disciple of Jesus: spending time with Jesus.

Look up the following passages. Both Peter and John mention that they are passing on what they themselves saw and heard.

2 Peter 1:16b, 18 – *“But we were eyewitnesses of his majesty...for we were with him on the holy mountain.”*

1 John 1:5a – *“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you.”*

The remaining questions will only have personal responses from your participants.



COMMIT DAY 5 – TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Participants will reflect on an ancient sarcophagus carving showing scenes of Peter—first witnessing Jesus’ miraculous deeds, and then, by God’s power, working a miracle himself.

Locate Jesus in scenes 1, 2, 3 and 5. What is Jesus doing with his right hand in each scene?

In each of the first four biblical scenes, Jesus’ right hand reaches out to work the miracle at hand: Jesus’ right hand reaches out to the hemorrhaging woman as her hand touches the hem of his garment, and her bleeding stops; Jesus reaches out and touches the bed of the paralytic, who, now healed, is carrying his bed; Jesus touches the eyes of the blind man, rubbing the clay and spittle that will bring healing after it is washed away; Jesus reaches out with his staff to touch the water jars, turning their contents from water to wine.

In numerous places throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, God’s right hand is an image of his might and powerful protection for his people. For example, what do the following verses say about God’s right hand?

Exodus 15:12 – *“Thou didst stretch out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them [Pharaoh’s chariots and army].” This is a verse from the song that Moses and the people of Israel sang in thanksgiving to God for saving them from Pharaoh’s army, which was destroyed in the Red Sea after Israel crossed safely on dry land.*

Psalms 139:9-10 – *“If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.” God’s right hand protects his faithful ones, holding and leading them at all times.*

What is Jesus holding in his left hand?

In each of the four biblical scenes, Jesus appears to be holding some type of scroll.

What item in Jesus’ hand in the Wedding of Cana scene now appears in Peter’s hand in the two last scenes? *In the miracle of the Wedding of Cana scene, Jesus is holding some type of staff. This staff connects Jesus’ hand to the miracle that happens in the jars, namely water turned to wine. This staff appears in Peter’s hand in the next scene, even though Peter is working no miracle at the time; in the last scene it connects Peter’s hand to the miraculous spring of water. Jesus has given to Peter, who was always with Jesus and witnessed his miraculous deeds, the power to work miracles in Jesus’ name.*