

CONTENTS

LESSON	TITLE	PAGE
1	PETER: A HARD-HITTING SERVANT	10
2	JAMES: FROM RAUCOUS LEADER TO RADICAL FOLLOWER	18
3	JOHN: ARROGANCE ALLEVIATED	26
4	ANDREW: LESS IS MORE	34
5	PHILIP: PASSIONATE PRAGMATISM	42
6	NATHANAEL BARTHOLOMEW: SINCERELY CONFOUNDED	50
7	MATTHEW: ETERNAL ENTREPRENEUR	58
8	THOMAS: A WOUNDED WITNESS	66
9	JAMES, SIMON, AND JUDAS: UNNOTICED BUT NOT UNREWARDED	74
10	JUDAS ISCARIOT: ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD	84
11	MATTHIAS: PRIVACY TO PROMINENCE	92
12	PAUL: MURDERER TURNED MISSIONARY	100

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

A STUDY OF THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLES

They recklessly followed, denied, loved, and betrayed our Lord, still Jesus saw fit to call them His Apostles and bestow on them the incredible responsibility of spreading the gospel throughout the world. Each one, brought a mosaic of backgrounds, experiences, personal strengths and weaknesses and together they stood shoulder to shoulder and ultimately became a band of brothers who would change the world.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

While this Bible study may be used individually, it is designed to be used within the context of small groups. Each group meeting should include all parts of the following “three-part agenda.”

Ice-Breaker: Fun, history-giving questions are designed to warm the group and to build understanding about the other group members. You can choose to use all of the Ice-Breaker questions, especially if there is a new group member who will need help in feeling comfortable with the group.

One of the purposes of this book is to begin and to then solidify a group. Therefore, getting to know one another and bonding together are essential to the success of this course. The goal is to get better acquainted during the Ice-Breaker part of each group session.

Bible Study: The heart of each meeting is the examination of the Bible. The questions are open, discovery questions that lead to further inquiry. Reference notes are provided to give everyone a “level playing field.” The emphasis is on understanding what the Bible says and applying the truth to real life. The questions for each session build. There is always at least one “going deeper” question provided. You should always leave time for the last of the “questions for interaction.” Should you choose, you can use the optional “going deeper” question to satisfy the desire for the challenging questions in groups that have been together for a while.

To help connect as a group, it is important for everyone to participate in the Bible Study. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. The group members should strive to make all of the other group members feel comfortable during the Bible Study time. Because we all have differing levels of biblical knowledge, it is essential that we appreciate the personal context from which answers are given. We don't have to know much about Scripture to bring our own perspectives on the truths contained in the Scriptures. It is vital to keep encouraging all group members to share what they are observing as we work through these important Bible passages.

Caring Time: All study should point us to actions. Each session ends with prayer and direction in caring for the needs of the group members. You can choose between several questions.

Small groups help the larger body of Christ in many ways: caring for individuals, holding one another up in prayer, providing emotional support, and bringing new men into the body by reaching out to new guys. Each week it is important to remember to pray for those whom God would bring to your group.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

Begin by reviewing the following ground rules and talk about the importance of “sharing your story” (see below).

GROUND RULES

- **Priority:** While you are in the group, you give the group meeting priority.
- **Participation:** Everyone participates, and no one dominates.
- **Respect:** Everyone is given the right to their own opinion, and all questions are encouraged and respected.
- **Confidentiality:** Anything that is said in the meeting is never repeated outside the meeting.

- **Empty Chair:** The group stays open to new men at every meeting.
- **Support:** Permission is given to call upon each other in time of need—even in the middle of the night.
- **Advice Giving:** Unsolicited advice is not allowed.
- **Mission:** We agree to do everything in our power to start a new group as our mission.

SHARING YOUR STORY

These sessions are designed for members to share a little of their personal lives each time the group meets. Through a number of special techniques, each member is encouraged to move from low risk, less personal sharing to higher risk responses. This helps develop community and facilitates caregiving.

Only when group members begin to share their own story does the group bond at levels deep enough for life-change to take place.

PETER: A HARD-HITTING SERVANT

WELCOME

In this study we will reflect on the lives of the apostles and what they can teach us. Though God will never choose one of us to be among those who laid the foundation of the church of Jesus Christ, He has chosen all of us to become men of God. These New Testament personalities point the way. The apostle Paul spoke for them all when he wrote, “Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ” (1 Co 11:1).



ICE-BREAKER

We live in a culture that wants things now. We don't want to wait even for spiritual maturity. Two millennia ago, neither did the apostle Peter. In that respect Peter and we are like impatient children. God had to slow Peter down and get his attention through failure. Hopefully we can learn without as much pain.

1. When you were growing up, which of these was hardest for you to wait for? Why?
 - a. Your birthday.
 - b. Summer vacation.
 - c. Christmas.
 - d. Baseball/football/basketball season.
 - e. Lunch.
 - f. Other _____.
2. In your childhood neighborhood who was the natural leader who influenced all the other guys? What was the biggest mess he ever got you all into?

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

The following Scriptures trace certain key encounters between Peter and Jesus that shaped this tough-minded businessman into one of God's greatest servants.

A New Name

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Him. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah!" (which means "Anointed One"), ⁴² and he brought Simon to Jesus. When Jesus saw him, He said, "You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which means "Rock").

John 1:40-42

Penetrating Accountability Questions

²⁷ Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will fall, because it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. ²⁸ But after I have been resurrected, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." ²⁹ Peter told Him, "Even if everyone falls, yet I will not!" ³⁰ "I assure you," Jesus said to him, "today, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times!" ³¹ But he kept insisting, "If I have to die with You, I will never deny You!" And they all said the same thing. ³² Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and He told His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be horrified and deeply distressed. ³⁴ Then He said to them, "My soul is swallowed up in sorrow—to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake." ³⁵ Then He went a little farther, fell to the ground, and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. ³⁶ And He said, "Abba, Father! All things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will." ³⁷ Then He came and found them sleeping. "Simon, are you sleeping?" He asked Peter. "Couldn't you stay awake one hour? ³⁸ Stay awake and pray, so that you won't enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Mark 14:27-38

Peter's Ultimate Failure

⁵⁴ They seized Him, led Him away, and brought Him into the high priest's house. Meanwhile Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵ When they had lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. ⁵⁶ When a servant saw him sitting in the firelight, and looked closely at him, she said, "This man was with Him too." ⁵⁷ But he denied it: "Woman, I don't know Him!" ⁵⁸ After a little while, someone else saw him and said, "You're one of them too!" "Man, I am not!" Peter said. ⁵⁹ About an hour later, another kept insisting, "This man was certainly with Him, since he's also a Galilean." ⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed.

Luke 22:54-60

Brokenness and Restoration

¹⁵ When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said to Him, “You know that I love You.” “Feed My lambs,” He told him.

¹⁶ A second time He asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” “Yes, Lord,” he said to Him, “You know that I love You.” “Shepherd My sheep,” He told him. ¹⁷ He asked him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved that He asked him the third time, “Do you love Me?” He said, “Lord, You know everything! You know that I love You.” “Feed My sheep,” Jesus said. . . . ¹⁹ After saying this, He told him, “Follow Me!”

John 21:15-17, 19b

PRINCIPLE DEVELOPMENT

Jesus took a tough-minded, successful businessman with a lot of raw talent and many rough edges and eventually changed him into a hard-hitting servant of God. It took time, but it happened. Underneath all that coarse exterior was a soft heart and a lot of love. Jesus changed him from the inside out.

Jesus also wants to change you.

PRINCIPLE 1

NO MATTER WHAT YOUR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE, JESUS CHRIST CAN USE YOU TO SERVE HIM.

God specializes in transforming our hearts, redirecting our self-centered energy, and reshaping our raw talent and abilities to achieve His purposes in this world. He did this for Peter and, as we'll see, for the other men who followed Him. They were all different and unique. Only Judas Iscariot turned his back on Jesus.

Each of us is created in God's image but with distinct reflections of His unfathomable and indescribable personality. When one of us is born again, God doesn't change the individual's uniqueness. Instead He uses those unique qualities to create a special member of His church, the body of Christ. The church's diversity with unity is to continue, but under the control of the Holy Spirit. In the lessons to follow we'll see God's purposes unfold in the unique personality of each apostle.

PRINCIPLE 2

IT TAKES TIME TO BECOME THE MAN GOD WANTS YOU TO BECOME.

As far as we know, Peter and his brother, Andrew, grew up in a good Jewish family. They had been taught the Law of Moses. The promise of the coming Messiah was not a strange concept to these men. When Peter began to follow Christ, it took several years for God to deal with his self-sufficiency, pride, and prejudice. Thankfully, the Lord could use him during this “growing up” period – when he “spoke like a child,” “thought like a child,” and “reasoned like a child” (1 Co 13:11). When Peter “became a man,” God used him to the full.

Even when Peter failed Jesus the most, he didn’t allow Satan to keep him in a state of defeat and despair. The important question is, What steps are you taking to forget “what is behind” and to set as your “goal the prize promised by God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus” (Php 3:13-14)?

PRINCIPLE 3

PREJUDICE IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT CHALLENGES MANY MEN FACE IN THEIR CHRISTIAN LIVES.

Five years after Pentecost, the Lord confronted Peter about his prejudice against Gentiles (Ac 10:1-36). When Peter obeyed the Lord and abandoned his bias, the rest of the church followed Peter’s lead. It was one of his finest moments.

I was reared in a very exclusive religious community. I had been taught from a small child that our particular church group included the only true followers of Jesus Christ. Eventually, I realized this was not true and decided to leave this environment.

Ironically, as I look back, I have to acknowledge that it also took approximately five years to fully deal with the prejudice in my life. Don’t be surprised, then, to discover that you may have prejudice lingering in your own soul. Don’t be surprised if God allows you to experience a “crisis of faith” so you can deal with it.

Two things are certain: 1. No man is mature in Christ who is prejudiced against others; 2. God cannot use a man to the full if he allows this sin to continue and to affect his attitudes and actions toward others.

QUESTIONS FOR INTERACTION

1. Which of these characteristics of Peter do you identify with most strongly? Why?
 - a. Aggressive business leader.
 - b. Spokesman for the group.
 - c. Maker of bold promises he couldn't keep.
 - d. Failure under pressure.
 - e. Humble and repentant man when confronted.
 - f. Struggler with stubborn prejudices.
 - g. Other _____.
2. Which of these reasons do you think best explains why Jesus renamed Simon "The Rock"? Explain your choice.
 - a. Jesus saw the solid strength inherent in Simon's personality.
 - b. Jesus gave Simon a name that would challenge him to become a rock.
 - c. Jesus used the name to predict how He would change Simon in spite of himself.
 - d. Jesus used the new name to intrigue Simon and prepare him to accept a call to discipleship.
3. Why do you think Peter got so defensive when Jesus predicted he would deny Him? What are some better ways Peter might have responded?
4. When Jesus asked Peter to pray with Him at Gethsemane, what personal benefit did Jesus hope Peter would gain from that prayer session?
5. How do you think each of these affected Peter's denial of Jesus?
 - a. His failure to pray in Gethsemane.
 - b. His fear and confusion caused by Jesus' arrest.
 - c. His instinct to save his hide.
 - d. His failure to grasp the nature of Jesus' mission to die for the sins of the world.
6. What do you imagine Peter thought about his relationship with God after he had denied Jesus three times?
7. Jesus let Peter affirm his love for Him three times – the same number of times as he had denied Him. What do you think that accomplished for Peter?
8. At what points in these stories do you identify most closely with Peter? Why?

9. Which of these three principles for spiritual growth challenges you most? Why?
 - a. No matter what your previous experience, Jesus Christ can use you to serve Him.
 - b. It takes time to become the man God wants you to be.
 - c. Prejudice is one of the most difficult challenges many men face in their Christian lives.



GOING DEEPER

10. How has God used failure in your life to make you more humble and compassionate in your attitudes toward others?
11. What do you sense God is trying to change about you now? What do you think He wants to accomplish as a result of this change?



CARING TIME

Peter was brash and impulsive, but he wasn't a fool. He was a natural leader whom Jesus prepared to play a key role in establishing the church. Jesus is at work preparing each of us for the role He has for us in His body.

1. What are some of the key elements in your education and background that you see God using in your service for Him?
2. What prejudices did you learn in your family and community as you grew up? How do you think you can tell when God has overcome these in your life?
3. Pray that each man in the group will cooperate with God patiently and hopefully during the lifelong process of becoming the men God wants us to be.

NEXT WEEK

Next week we look at the apostle James. James appears second in the Gospel lists of the disciples, always after Peter. That had to grate on him, because James was a man bent on being the most important guy in the room. When we learn how Jesus molded this power-hungry man into a model of servanthood, we will have picked up a valuable life lesson.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

NOTES ON JOHN 1:40-42

1:42 Cephias. The Aramaic name Cephias and the Greek name Peter both mean “rock.” By renaming Simon upon first meeting him, Jesus challenged Simon to let Him transform his life and character. Although Peter often seemed unstable during Jesus’ time with him (18:15-17, 25-27), after the ascension, Peter became the chief spokesman for the apostles and was later to be a leader in the early church (Ac 2:14).

NOTES ON MARK 14:27-38

14:32 Gethsemane. An olive orchard in an estate at the foot of the Mount of Olives just outside the eastern wall of Jerusalem. The name means literally “an olive press” (for making olive oil).

14:33 Peter, James, and John. Several times in the Gospels these three men accompany Jesus during a time of great significance. The recent rebuke by Peter (8:32) and self-centered request of James and John (10:35-40) did not damage their relationships with Jesus. Also note that each of these men had vowed to stay with Jesus through thick and thin (10:38-39; 14:29, 31). What Jesus asks them to share with Him here is not glory (which they wanted) but sorrow (which they kept denying would come). **deeply distressed.** Literally, filled with “shuddering awe.” The human Jesus was filled with deep sorrow as the impact of submitting to His Father’s will hit Him. Thus he could understand the great emotional swings Peter experienced.

14:34 stay awake. This was an invitation for Peter to join Jesus in preparation for the severe trial that was soon to come. While it expresses Jesus’ desire for human companionship in His time of crisis, it also points out that Peter needed to prepare himself (vv. 37-41).

14:35 fell to the ground. This accents the emotional distress He was feeling. **began to pray.** This is the third time in Mark’s Gospel that Jesus has been shown in prayer (1:35; 6:46). **the hour.** This word is often used to refer to an event that represents a crucial turning point in God’s plan for a person or for the world (Mk 13:11,32; Jn 13:1; 16:32). In reference to Jesus, it specifically refers to His crucifixion (Jn 12:23).

14:36 Abba. This is how a child would address his father: “Daddy.” This was not a title that was used in prayer in the first century. **this cup.** Like the word “hour,” “cup” was also used in an image referring to the destiny God had in store for a person. **Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.**

There was no doubt in Jesus' mind regarding what the Father's will was in this situation. While He pleaded that there might be another way, this sentence declares His commitment to follow the Father's lead regardless of the cost (14:42).

NOTES ON LUKE 22:54-60

22:54 the high priest. This was the spiritual head of Israel. On the Day of Atonement the high priest alone could enter the Most Holy Place and, with sprinkled blood, make atonement for the sins of the people. Caiaphas was the high priest before whom Jesus came (Mt 26:57).

22:59 since he's also a Galilean. This would have been known because of his accent. Peter lived in Capernaum, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He shared a house with his brother Andrew (Mk 1:29) and fished professionally. He may have been the foreman for the fleet of Zebedee, the father of James and John.

22:60 a rooster crowed. Roosters in Palestine might crow anytime between midnight and 3 a.m. (which was the reason that that particular watch was called "cock-crow"). Peter's denials therefore occurred in the very early morning hours.

NOTES ON JOHN 21:15-17, 19B

21:15 do you love Me more than these? This question is ambiguous, but Jesus is probably asking Peter if indeed he loves Him more than the others do as Peter indicated in 13:37. In asking this question, Jesus allows Peter the opportunity three times to pledge his love for Him. **Feed my lambs.** After each query about his love, Jesus calls Peter to demonstrate that love by being a "good shepherd" to Jesus' sheep. From this time Peter abandoned fishing and resumed leadership of the apostles (Ac 1:15). He preached the Pentecost sermon that launched the public ministry of the church (Ac. 2). He spearheaded the growth of the church in Jerusalem, Judea, and to Gentiles (Ac 2 - 10).

21:19b Follow Me! The important thing for Peter was to forget His failure, accept Jesus' forgiveness, and renew his commitment to be a Christ follower (12:26).