



HERO STUDY

THE LIFE OF PETER



The Greatest Good You are Ever Gonna Get

A BRIEF INTRODUCTORY BIBLE STUDY

ENTERING THE TEXT

Who are you? What makes you, you? What family traditions, cultural practices, and faith practices (if any) make you who you are?

INTRODUCTION OF CEPHAS

Of the original twelve disciples of Jesus, few are more famous/infamous than Simon Peter. The only one that can give Peter a run for his money is Judas, and that's because he literally had money since he sold-out Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Looking at Simon, who Jesus later renamed Cephas(Peter), you can find yourself rooting for him at one moment, while frustrated at him during others. Cephas is often the first to ask Jesus pressing questions, even taking on the role as the de facto leader of the others, before Jesus even confirmed as much. Peter also had a habit of being extra and wayward, often trying to go out of his way to prove his loyalty to Jesus while and at other times misrepresenting Jesus



and sinning against God's people. Was Peter a Hero, giving up everything for Jesus? Or was Peter a villain who denied Jesus and even acted with sinful racial bias.

“

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

”

However you feel about Peter, one thing is for certain: We can learn a lot about Jesus by how he responds to Peter.

This bible study walks through moments in Peter's life as he not only comes to be part of the fellowship of Jesus, but goes on to be an icon of faith for centuries to come. Peter's story is one of many ups and downs, as he finds a place to **belong** in Jesus, has the **intimacy** in his relationship with Jesus strained and repaired, this leads to his eventual declaration of personal **belief** in Jesus which he declares to thousands, and finally Cephas establishes a **practice** of following Jesus wholeheartedly.

For the next few weeks, we will examine Peter's journey toward Jesus with experiences of Belonging, Intimacy, Belief and Practice shaping him as a disciple of Jesus. In examining Peter's life, we will also be challenged each week to look at our own lives and how the scriptures we read are affected by them.

Ultimately, we will see the events that transform Peter into the man that authors 1st Peter, a letter of assurance to the various believers throughout the world:

I PETER 2:9-10

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

“

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

”

DISCUSSION POINTS

What did you believe/know about Jesus growing up?

How has that changed, if at all?

Looking ahead to the next few weeks:

- i. What are you curious about?
- ii. What are you nervous about?
- iii. What are you looking forward to?

PRAY AND CLOSE



ENTERING THE TEXT

What are some things that give you identity? Jobs, hobbies, skills, passions?

What communities are you a part of because of those things?

If someone told you that your true purpose required you to give up a part or all of that thing, would you? Why or why not?

PRAY AS YOU BEGIN

Ask for clarity, focus and wisdom as you approach the passage.

CONTEXT

In 1st century Jewish culture, one of the best come ups was becoming a rabbi. As teachers and studiers of Jewish Law, rabbis held a lot of respect and authority in Jewish society.

But not just anyone could be a rabbi, as only the most observant, intelligent, and skilled individuals could become a disciple (or student) of a rabbi. Being a disciple of a rabbi was a great honor. Cephas, along with his brother and friends were among the many people in Galilee who didn't make the cut, and as such took up their family business to provide for their family. In Cephas' case, this was fishing.

Luke 5 picks up after Jesus has begun preaching about "The Kingdom of God." People have been trying to see and hear him.

READ LUKE 5:1-11(NIV)

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

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."

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled 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.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

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.

“

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

...Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people."

”

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. What do you think was on the minds of people hearing Jesus' sermon on the lake?
2. What is the significance of Jesus stepping onto Cephas' boat?
3. Why do you think that Cephas complies with Jesus' commands? What does this say about what Cephas thinks of Jesus?
4. Why would Cephas and his partners leave everything to follow Jesus?
5. Do you think Cephas' family or society would view him as good or bad, hero or villain (Cephas left a WHOLE wife behind to follow Jesus!)?
6. What is something (relationship, place, possession) that represents your belonging? What tension would you feel in leaving this behind?

CLOSING

If Cephas knew nothing else, he knew how to fish. He just had an off night. Then, Jesus comes along, and he guides them into an overabundance that they could only have dreamed of. Cephas' nets represented his craft, but on a deeper level, where he belonged. As a fisherman, he belonged at sea. But Jesus invited him into a greater belonging: "Follow me."

If Jesus were inviting you to leave those things for something bigger, would you? Following Jesus often requires us to give up something. Jesus has a greater purpose, and a greater belonging that he wants you to be a part of, but he may be calling you to leave some things behind in order to follow him. He could also be calling you to engage people

“

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

....Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people."

”

and situations differently. This requires you to really pay attention to the words of the Holy Spirit.

Let's take some time to pray and see if there is something Jesus may be inviting us to leave or engage differently, in order to receive the greater call he has for us.



Who Do You Love

INITIMACY AND RELATIONSHIP

Peter's Redemption (John 21:2-19)

WEEKLY DEBRIEF

Debrief prayer and listening from last week. Give space for people to share how they're feeling, what they heard, and/or what they did.

DISCUSSION

How important is loyalty to you? When have you felt betrayed or when has someone broken your trust? Have you forgiven them? Why/why not? What did/would it take for you to forgive them?

PRAY AS YOU BEGIN

Ask for clarity, focus and wisdom as you approach the passage

CONTEXT:

At the end of His story, Jesus died for the forgiveness of all sins, past, present and future. When we read about this it's easy to have hope knowing his resurrection is around the corner.

For those who walked, talked, and lived with Jesus for three years, watching their friend and teacher die the death of a criminal was a heart-shattering moment. Especially for his disciples, who left everything to follow Jesus. These disciples must have felt hopeless. As a disciple, Cephas was feeling hopeless after Jesus' crucifixion. On top of all of this, he was now an accomplice to Jesus' alleged crimes.

Prior to Jesus' death, Cephas assured Jesus that he was loyal, but Jesus said that he would deny even knowing Jesus when things got real. Of course, as Jesus said he would, Cephas denied knowing Jesus three times following the crucifixion. But Jesus had more in store for Peter, and returned to his followers with redemption in hand.

John 21 occurs after Jesus has appeared to a few people, namely Mary and Mary. At this point, Cephas hasn't seen Jesus himself.

READ JOHN 21:2-19 (NIV)

Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. 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.

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 around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

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." 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."

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."

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!"

“

...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.”

”

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Why would Cephas have returned to his old profession (fishing)?
2. How do you imagine Peter is feeling?
3. What thoughts about himself could he be internalizing? Do you think he feels like a hero or villain?
4. What past event does the setting of this passage resemble?
5. Why does Jesus ask Cephas if he loves him 3 times?
6. What does Jesus mean when he says “feed my sheep?” “Take care of my sheep?”
7. What can we observe about Jesus’ character in this passage?

CLOSING

Even with Cephas’ denial, Jesus had no beef with Cephas. Cephas was expecting to be cancelled by Jesus, but that never happened. Jesus already knew what Cephas would do, but still brought him into his inner circle. Jesus wanted an intimate and real relationship with Cephas, because intimacy with Jesus leads to healing and restoration. The grace that Jesus gives upon his return only serves to deepen his relationship with Cephas and, in turn, increases the significance of Cephas’ redemption.

Jesus offers us the same redemption and choice of intimacy today. Regardless of how we struggle, fail, and even betray him, he always offers us another chance to express our loyalty. Jesus is asking “Do You Love Me?” even after we’ve fallen to our darkest place, because he wants us to follow him

Are you answering with a definite yes when Jesus asks “Do

“

...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.”

”

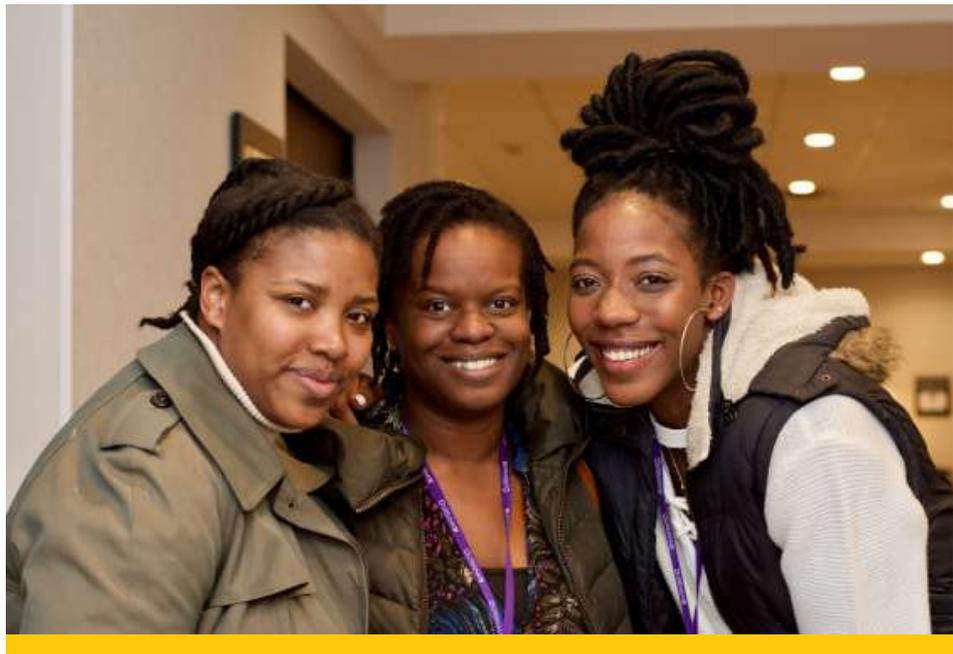
you love me?” Why, or why not? How does that shape how you pursue Jesus in your daily life?

Take time to ask yourself these questions and write down your thoughts. After a few minutes, share what you thought about with the group.

RESPONSE

Set aside time this week to meditate on your relationship with Jesus and how you would like it to change. Jesus’ next step for Cephas in building their relationship was “feed my sheep”. What is it for you?

Do you have a friend in need? Take some time to consider how Jesus might have you meet that need. Take a risk this week to meet that need.



All of Me

BELIEF

Peter's Cleansing (John 13:1-17)

WEEKLY DEBRIEF

Debrief prayer and listening from last week. Give space for people to share how they're feeling, what they heard, and/or what they did.

DISCUSSION

Is there someone in your life that you love and admire who you would, without question, go over and wash their dishes? What if they came over to do your dishes? How would you feel? Would you let them? Why or why not?

PRAY AS YOU BEGIN

Ask for clarity, focus and wisdom as you approach the passage

CONTEXT:

Culturally, after travelers travel long distances (and have gathered dirt, sand, and dust in their sandals) hosts would provide water for them to wash their feet to be hospitable to their guests. People washing their feet when entering a home is common, but they usually wash their own feet, unless there is a servant who was assigned to remove the guests' sandals and wash their feet for them. Jewish culture highly valued humility and hospitality, but like other communities, also had societal roles and standards. An honored guest washing the feet of someone else would be an abnormal reversal of roles.

This text takes place the night before Jesus' death, and soon after this passage Jesus will be betrayed and arrested.

Let's remember that Jesus is not just their friend. He's someone who lived a life knowing that he was going to take the fall and suffer the punishment of crimes that he did not commit on behalf of all humanity.

READ JOHN 13:1-17

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

“

“...Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean.

”

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. What do you think Cephas was thinking as he watched Jesus washing the feet of some of the other disciples?
1. Why do you think he was against having Jesus washing his feet?
1. What does Cephas' response to Jesus in vs 9 say about how Cephas regards Jesus?
1. What does it mean that “no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him” (vs 16)?
1. Jesus has “all things under his power” (vs 3) and with the time he has left he decides to steward this power by serving them in such an unusual way. Jesus is a true Hero; why do you think he sees washing the disciple's feet as important?

CLOSING

In this passage, we see Jesus partake in an act of servitude that Cephas deemed beneath him as his respected and honored teacher and Lord. Jesus explains to Cephas why he needs to wash his feet. Because of his intimacy with Jesus, Cephas believes him when he says he must do it, or Cephas will have no part in him. This belief leads him to be fully in, “not just my feet, but my hands and head as well”! He is all in. We can see here that belief is more than just knowing facts. Cephas shows us that belief is trust and action. Cephas' belief leads ultimately to submission to Jesus.

“

“...Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean.

”

RESPONSE

What do you believe about Jesus?

Do those things affect the way you live your life today?

Do you feel like you represent Jesus with your belief and actions? Why or why not?

What do you need in order to believe and/or to connect your belief in Jesus and your actions? What would it take for you to really be all in?

PRAY AND CLOSE



Call His Name

PRACTICE

Peter's Courage (Acts 4:1-13)

WEEKLY DEBRIEF

Debrief prayer and listening from last week. Give space for people to share how they're feeling, what they heard, and/or what they did.

DISCUSS

Think about a time that you got in trouble for doing the right thing. How did you feel? Did it make it harder to do the same right thing in the future? Share your experiences.

CONTEXT

Cephas and John (another disciple of Jesus) are teaching people about the significance of Jesus' murder and resurrection, and the people are responding! About 5,000 men have made decisions to become baptized and follow Jesus.

The same system that put Jesus to death for teaching about the truth of who he is and that the Kingdom of God has drawn near, is against the continued teaching of Jesus' resurrection. Cephas, John, and anyone else who continues to teach about Jesus are at high risk of legally being arrested, tortured, and killed for openly rebelling against the Law.

READ ACTS 4:1-13

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is

"the stone you builders rejected,

which has become the cornerstone.'

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

“

...It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected,

which has become the cornerstone.’

”

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Why are people compelled to listen to what Cephas and John are teaching?
2. What are the dynamics that could have kept Cephas and John from teaching about Jesus?
3. How does “this Cephas” differ from Cephas in the other passages we’ve studied? Is Cephas acting as a hero or a villain here?
4. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Cephas responds to the high priest’s question. What do you think astonished them about what Cephas said?

CLOSING

Cephas, knowing that the Holy Spirit was guiding and strengthening him, was bold in his teaching of who Jesus is, the significance of his death and resurrection, and what people’s response to it all should be. This is a different Cephas from the one who was first called to be a fisher of men. This is a different Cephas from the one who denied Jesus three times. This Cephas is bold and intentional and filled with the Holy Spirit, living his life for the Jesus he believes in and follows, stepping fully into what Jesus has called him to. He is the Cephas that wrote:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:9-10 (NIV)

Cephas was able to find a place to belong in Jesus and to

“

...It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.”

”

enter the intimacy of relationship with him. He declared his belief in Jesus to thousands of people and established a practice of following Jesus wholeheartedly. Encountering the Hero Jesus, Cephas became a hero who recognized that those under the Lordship of Jesus are more like royalty than villains. This is healing and life for Peter and for us!

RESPONSE

Where are you right now?

Are you looking for belonging, an authentic community to explore what it looks like to be fully who you are with no judgement? To be seen and heard as a person of African descent, though that is not all you are?

Are you looking for intimacy, a safe space to be known and vulnerable, to ask questions about faith, your identity, and the world? Are you wondering if Jesus is for you and your community?

Are you in a place of belief, where you believe Jesus is real and a tangible agent in the transformation of your life and community?

Are you wanting to declare your belief for the first time?(if Yes, see Gospel Story below)

“

...It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.”

”

Are you wanting to practice your decision to follow Jesus in a way that impacts your relationships, life decisions, and community?

Let's take some time to reflect and pray individually, then we'll share together in a bit.

End by praying into your commitments, asking Jesus to meet you where you are and guide you to where they want to be.



GOSPEL STORY

God made all people in His image which means we were created as God's special people, as a reflection of Him, our King. This means our people and culture were created with purpose, by God, and He delights in his design.

However, because of evil and sin, Black people have endured racism and been mislabeled as villains, thugs, criminals, sexual objects, poor, needy, lazy, etc.

God sees sin, especially the sin of racism and how it has demonized Black people. We may also fall victim to internalizing and reinforcing these lies and even participating in evil. Have you ever hurt someone?

Jesus relates to our story as Black people. He was persecuted and lynched on a tree because he was labeled a criminal. He overcomes the evil we have felt and offers forgiveness for the pain we've caused. Jesus enters this messed up world to give us hope. He treats us with kindness though the world is against us. Jesus wants to remind each of us that we are chosen.

Jesus doesn't stop there! He invites us further. Those whom God has brought out of darkness are invited by Jesus to reach out to others that have been affected by brokenness. "Now you must tell all the wonderful things he has done. " (1 Peter 2:9b). You can bring your gifts to Jesus and join him in creating a beloved community that overcomes evil.



