

Praise for the Real People, Real Faith Bible Study Series

“Jodie Niznik’s writing transcends mere information and targets actual transformation. . . . With sensitivity and an ongoing desire to encourage her readers, Jodie introduces each lesson with a spiritual practice to help them in their relationship with the Lord.”

DR. E. ANDREW MCQUITTY, pastor at large at Irving Bible Church and author of *The Way to Brave*

“Each weekly lesson includes a practice session to help us apply gleaned wisdom for navigating our own crossroads. Jodie’s studies move us toward transformative biblical literacy and an action-packed faith that lives what’s learned.”

SUE EDWARDS, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and author of the Discover Together Bible Study series

“Jodie Niznik offers solid teaching and hands-on application that have the potential to transform us. Filled with outstanding questions and exercises, [her studies] encourage a deep level of engagement.”

NANCY BEACH, leadership coach with the Slingshot Group and author of *Gifted to Lead*

“Niznik’s highly practical invitations toward spiritual disciplines further root me in the powerful message that I am loved, God has a plan for my life, and obedience brings joy. This will be a perfect Bible study addition to any ministry longing to deepen women’s connection to God.”

MARY DEMUTH, author of over forty books, including *Into the Light*

“Jodie’s Bible studies are some of my favorite resources! Her insightful and practical application of Scripture keeps her studies at the top of my list.”

KAT ARMSTRONG, preacher, author of *The In-Between Place*, and cofounder of the Polished Network

REAL PEOPLE, REAL FAITH BIBLE STUDIES

Choose: A Study of Moses for a Life That Matters

*Crossroads: A Study of Esther and Jonah
for Boldly Responding to Your Call*

*Trust: A Study of Joseph for Persevering
Through Life's Challenges*

*Journey: A Study of Peter for Stumbling
Toward Jesus's Extravagant Grace*

A

REAL PEOPLE

REAL FAITH

BIBLE STUDY

JOURNEY

*A Study of Peter for Stumbling
Toward Jesus's Extravagant Grace*

JODIE NIZNIK



KREGEL
PUBLICATIONS

Journey: A Study of Peter for Stumbling Toward Jesus’s Extravagant Grace
© 2022 by Jodie Niznik

Published by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel Inc., 2450 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505. www.kregel.com.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without the publisher’s prior written permission or by license agreement. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

The image that appears on page 152 was created by Lindsey Sobolik and is used with her permission.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked NLT are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-0-8254-4736-5, print
ISBN 978-0-8254-7722-5, epub
ISBN 978-0-8254-6873-5, Kindle

Printed in the United States of America
22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 / 5 4 3 2 1



To Mom:

I've loved seeing you embrace Jesus and follow him as his disciple. You remind me a lot of Peter, and that is a very good thing. Keep being bold and brave. I'm so proud to be your daughter.

.....

CONTENTS



Why Peter and Why Now? 9
What to Expect in This Study 11

1. Called to Follow 13
2. Learning to Follow 37
3. Confessions and Costs 57
4. Are You Listening? 77
5. Humble Servant 97
6. Missing the Mark 117
7. Repentance and Renewal 141
8. Living It Out 165

Acknowledgments 187
Notes 189
About the Author 191

WHY PETER AND WHY NOW?



I've always been drawn to Peter. I love how he seemed so uninhibited in the way he followed Jesus. One moment he was a fisherman with a boat, a home, and a family—and the next he'd left it all behind to be a penniless student and follower of Jesus. Scripture also paints him with boldness when it recounts the story of Peter asking Jesus to command him to get out of a boat and walk on water. Peter knew that the laws of nature meant he couldn't walk on water, but he believed with Jesus he could—and so he did. He eventually became a bold and brave preacher, gaining the power to heal people in Jesus's name. He was unarguably a powerful man of God.

But Peter was far from perfect. He slept when he should have prayed. He denied Jesus when he should have proudly proclaimed their association. He talked when he should have listened. He even tried to assert his ideas over God's. It's here, in all his flaws, that I identify with Peter the most.

If God can use Peter, who stumbled and fumbled in such dramatic fashion, then he can use me too. This is the extravagant grace of God. He chooses to use us, even with our imperfections.

I've come to believe that this is one of the reasons we get to see Peter's mistakes in Scripture. I think Peter proudly stood by the accounting of his life because he wanted us to know that, just like him, we will all stumble as we follow Jesus, but that's where God's grace comes in.

Every time Peter stumbles as he journeys with Jesus, we see our patient Savior catch him in extravagant grace and set him back on the path of discipleship. Eventually, we'll be witnesses to

Peter as he transforms before our eyes. I hope his journey inspires you as it has me. If Peter can become a powerhouse of God's kingdom, so can we. Peter came to believe that following Jesus was worth it, no matter the cost. I also believe it is worth it. I hope you will come to the same conclusion.

May we stumble toward Jesus together.

—Jodie

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS STUDY



Practice Sections

Each week our lesson will start with a short practice section. These practices are an opportunity for you to take some of the concepts we are learning and live them out, perhaps in a way you've never tried before. These practices won't take a lot of time, but they may require some planning. Therefore, we will start each lesson with the practice section. Prayerfully read it through and then make a plan to try the suggested activities.

You may discover something you really love in these little sections—something that brings new life into your relationship with the Lord. You may also discover that some of these exercises will take effort. Some may be hard for you to do and others may be easy, even fun! But they will all help you stretch and grow. Growth almost always brings the spiritual fruit of a changed life. For me, that makes any effort totally worth it.

Pacing Your Study

Each week of this study includes a practice for the week and four study sessions. You are welcome to tackle as much of the week's material as you would like on any given day. However, I suggest giving yourself five days to complete the week's work, and I have marked the sections accordingly. If you break it into these chunks, the study shouldn't take you more than thirty minutes to do each day. If you are a researcher or an extensively reflective thinker, you may want to set aside more time for each day's study time.

In general, you will find the days broken down as follows:

Day one will be reading about and planning for the practice activity.

Days two through five will be Scripture reading and answering the questions in this study guide.

If you start running behind (we all have those weeks), you may have to pick and choose which questions you want to answer. My advice is to make the Scripture reading your first priority. Then if you have time, scan through the questions to see which ones you want to answer.

As is usually the case, the higher the investment, the greater the return. When we collaborate with Jesus by inviting him into our lives and spending time with him, we experience life transformation. As your life is transformed, you will find it looking more and more like the life God designed you to live. Make every effort to arrange your days so that you can regularly spend time with Jesus.



WEEK 1

CALLED TO FOLLOW



Day 1

Practice: Lectio Divina

From the first moment Jesus and Peter met, they had a deep connection. Jesus saw who Peter was and who he could become. He knew Peter had the potential to change the world. And he invited Peter to follow him. This calling and invitation was really a way for Peter to get to know Jesus and his ways better. As he followed, he got a front-row seat to Jesus's teaching, healing, and other miracles. He also got to see how Jesus treated people. Peter quickly learned what kinds of people broke Jesus's heart or made him angry. Peter also witnessed how Jesus spent his time and what his priorities were. In short, Peter was invited to become a disciple of his rabbi, Jesus.

Disciple is an ancient word for someone who followed a respected teacher, learned their ways, and committed to living similarly. The closer a disciple followed, the more like their teacher they became. In fact, there was a phrase that many ancient disciples aspired to, which was to be "covered in the dust of their rabbi." As teachers, or rabbis, walked the dusty ancient roads, their disciples would aim to walk so closely behind them and mimic their steps that they would become covered in their

rabbi's dust. It's a beautiful picture of what it looks like to follow with intent.

Like us, Peter was invited to a journey like this with Jesus. As we will quickly discover, he had moments when he did follow closely—but also moments when he seemed to veer off course. I think this will become a great comfort to you, as it has been to me, because we can be a lot like Peter. We have moments of getting things right and moments of wandering off.

We obviously won't get to have the same firsthand experiences Peter got with Jesus. Wouldn't it have been amazing to witness one of Jesus's miracles or sit on a hillside and hear him preach in his earthly voice? Thankfully, we do get the details of these events recorded in God's Word. And while we may wish we could have seen Jesus walk the earth like Peter did, Jesus clearly tells us that what we receive is actually better. As believers in Jesus, we get the Holy Spirit. God sent his Spirit to teach, guide, and convict us and ultimately to help us on our own discipleship journey (John 16:7–13). As it turns out, we can still be metaphorically covered in the dust of our rabbi Jesus as we follow him guided by the Spirit.

Since this study is focused on our discipleship journey, I want to introduce you to a few of the ways you can practice being a disciple of Jesus today. Each lesson will start with an activity that is intended to help you grow as a follower of Jesus. Some may be familiar to you—and if so, I hope you will seek to experience them in a fresh way—and some of these practices may be brand new. Either way, I'm hopeful that they will guide you deeper in your discipleship journey. After all, being a disciple isn't just about collecting more information about Jesus; it is also about intentionally following his ways.

This week our practice will be centered on spending time with Jesus through a centuries-old practice called *Lectio Divina*, which is Latin and simply means the divine or sacred (*divina*) reading of Scripture (*lectio*). This style of reflective reading is a little different from the Bible study methods we use in this study. My hope is that you will find *Lectio Divina* to be a meaningful addition to how you study God's Word. I've selected a few passages for

you to choose from. Each one is an episode that Peter would have witnessed in his first days of following Jesus. Although there isn't space to cover these passages in our lessons, they still hold a lot of insight and truth for us.



If you would like to experience more Lectio Divina, I encourage you to listen to my podcast, *So Much More: Creating Space for God*, where I read God's Word and guide you through this process. You will also find interviews with Christian leaders on how the Lord guided them in the same passages. You can find the podcast, including a series of episodes that coincide with this study, anywhere you listen to podcasts or on my website, JodieNiznik.com.



I've given you six steps to guide you in this practice and I recommend you set aside at least fifteen to twenty minutes to do it. I'm hopeful that even if the passage you choose is familiar, the Lord will draw you to notice and reflect on something new that helps you know Jesus in a deeper way.

Step One: Relax

Find a quiet space where you can sit in an attentive yet relaxed posture. Take a few deep breaths and ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes and heart to see what he wants you to see. Ask him to guide you to the passage he wants you to read and reflect on.

Step Two: First Reading

Choose one of the following passages to prayerfully read. This first reading is to familiarize yourself with the text. There is no agenda beyond this.

Passage 1: John 2:12–22, Jesus cleared the temple

Passage 2: John 3:1–21, Jesus taught Nicodemus

Passage 3: John 4:1–27, Jesus interacted with the Samaritan woman

Step Three: Second Reading and Reflection

Before you begin the second reading of the same text, pray and ask the Lord to draw your attention to a word or phrase in the text. Then begin reading the text slowly, perhaps even out loud. When you are finished reading, sit for a few moments and reflect on the word or phrase the Lord seemed to draw you to. Try not to overthink this part. If a word or phrase seems to stand out, go with it. After you settle on the word or phrase, ask God why he wanted you to notice this word or phrase.

Step Four: Third Reading and Response

Before you begin the third reading, ask the Lord to help you see more clearly what he has for you. As you read this third time notice again the word or phrase from reading two. Feel free to even stop at the word or phrase and just sit there. Ask the Lord, how does this apply to my life? (You could explore if there is something you need to notice, do, say, stop, confess, etc.) Respond to God in prayer.

Step Five: Fourth Reading and Resting

Read the passage one last time and then take a few moments to be present with God and rest in his goodness and love for you.

Step Six: Reflect

Take a few minutes to pray or journal about your experience. Spend time reflecting on whether there is anything God seems to be inviting you to do, believe, or become as a result of this time with him. If something comes to mind, write it down. Then write one next step you could take this week.

PRACTICE REMINDER

If you haven't already, take some time to do the Lectio Divina process with one of the passages listed in the practice section.



Day 2

What Do You Want?

Do you remember the first time you were introduced to Jesus? Maybe you have one of those amazing stories where you've never really known life without him. What a gift. Or maybe you met him as an adult, after living a lot of life without him. This is also a gift in its own way. Perhaps you still haven't quite decided what you think of Jesus. If that's the case, I'm so glad you are doing this study because you will get to see him in an up close and personal way.

For me, I wasn't raised in a Christian home and I had, sadly, lived a lot of life for the tender age of thirteen. That summer I went to camp in the Blue Ridge Mountains and as my cabinmates and I sat around a dying campfire, our counselor told us the story of Jesus and his death and resurrection. She then offered us an opportunity to accept the gift of salvation from him. It was the first time I'd ever heard about Jesus.

I remember each of us scattering about to take time to reflect on what we heard. I lay back on the hard ground and gazed up wide-eyed at the night sky. I'm not sure what was happening with the rest of the girls, but my heart and mind felt like they might explode. Could it be? Did the God of the universe see me and love me? Did he want to give me new life through Jesus, even after all the terrible things I had done? My counselor assured me that was the case. She then invited me to imagine that Jesus was offering me a gift and if I wanted it, I could take it.

I can still vividly picture what I imagined that night. It was a

huge gold box with a big white bow. (That feels like a heavenly gift, doesn't it?) I told Jesus I believed in him and received his gift. When I opened the box, light poured out. In that moment, I was forever changed. I still knew very little about God or Jesus; I just knew I felt loved, seen, and known in a way I had never felt before. I felt like a weight had been lifted off my young shoulders.

A few years later, when I was nineteen, I felt another call. This time it was an invitation to follow Jesus in a deeper way. You see, since I had entered college, I had been trying to live life on my own terms, and I was not doing a great job. As I was crying out to him for help, he made it clear that I needed to change some things. This invitation wasn't as easy and seemingly beautiful as the first one. It felt scary and hard. It meant changing friends. It meant disrupting my lifestyle. However, my way clearly wasn't working, and I had a deep sense that even though his way would feel initially disruptive, following Jesus intentionally would ultimately lead me to deeper joy and peace.

As we embark on our study of Peter, we will see that he also had multiple callings. The apostle's initial call to follow Jesus was just a first encounter. It was the beginning of Peter getting to know Jesus. Later Jesus called Peter again, and this time asked him to leave everything and follow him.

Peter's faith journey is much like our own. He took steps forward and backward with Jesus. I love that Scripture doesn't scrub out his missteps to only highlight the bright spots of Peter's life. Instead, his highs and lows shine together and reveal Jesus's extravagant grace for Peter . . . and us.

Wherever you are on your faith journey, know that Jesus is calling you to take another step toward him. My prayer is that this study will help you take those next steps—even if they feel a little scary and hard. Because the way of following Jesus is always the better way.

Read John 1:35–42.

A number of people are mentioned in this passage. It can get confusing fast. And to make it even more confusing, one person

can be referred to by multiple names. Just like I could be called “Niznik,” or “Jodie,” or even “Jodie Gail.” All are suitable names for me. (But please don’t call me Jodie Gail or I’ll think I’m in trouble.) Sometimes several people have the same name or similar names. (How many Jennifers do you know?) Thus, before we get started, let me give you a little cheat sheet on who we will be studying.

John the Baptist

John, also known as John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1), was the one God sent to prepare the way for Jesus. He said of himself, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord’” (John 1:23).

Andrew and John the Apostle

John the Baptist’s two disciples, or students, were Andrew (John 1:40) and most likely John the Apostle. We presume the unnamed disciple is John the Apostle because he became the author of the book of John. John was a common name, and this is why we differentiate the two men with distinctions of John the *Apostle* and John the *Baptist*.

Peter

Peter is our main character. He is called Simon, Simon Peter, Peter, and Cephas (Greek for Peter) throughout Scripture. He was given the name Simon Bar-Jonah at birth (Matthew 16:17 ESV). Bar-Jonah simply means “son of Jonah.” Today we might call him Simon Jonahson. Simon was a very common name. There are at least seven different Simons in the Gospel accounts and Jesus had two disciples named Simon (Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot). Jesus gave our Simon the name Peter.

Simon Peter was originally from Bethsaida (John 1:44) but moved to the larger town of Capernaum (Mark 1:21, 29) before he met Jesus. Both towns were located on the northern side of the Sea of Galilee. Simon Peter was a fisherman by trade and owned his own boat, indicating he may have had some level of success in the business. He was also married. We know this because Jesus

healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law in Luke 4:38 and Paul states in 1 Corinthians 9:5 that Simon Peter took his wife on at least one missionary journey.

Simon Peter became the leader of the original twelve disciples of Jesus, also sometimes called the apostles, and he is mentioned by name more than anyone else (besides Jesus) in the Gospels. He was clearly important to Jesus.

1. John the Baptist saw Jesus passing by and pointed him out to his disciples. The two set out after Jesus. What did Jesus say to them in John 1:38 when he spots them?

2. As you embark on this Bible study journey of following after Jesus through the eyes of Peter, imagine Jesus turns and asks you, "What do you want?" or "What are you seeking?" (John 1:38 *esv*). Take a moment to pray through this question. How would you honestly respond to Jesus? (Do your best not to give a "churchy" or pat answer, but to state what you truly want.)

3. Andrew and John followed Jesus and spent the day with him. Andrew couldn't keep Jesus to himself. Read the following verses and circle the three actions Andrew took next.

"The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus." (John 1:41–42)

I want to make sure you clearly see the three things Andrew did. So, while I won't do this a lot, I am going to answer the previous question for you. Andrew *found* his brother, *told* him about Jesus, and then *brought* him to Jesus.

4. Has anyone ever done something like this for you? What happened? Why was it effective or ineffective?

5. Pray and ask God if there is anyone he wants you to find, tell, and bring to him. If someone comes to mind, ask the Lord to help you think of some practical ways you could do this and write them below. What steps can you take this week to start this process? Is there anything that feels like it is holding you back? If so, what is it?

If you feel like God is asking you to find, tell, and bring someone to him in some way, remember that you're only responsible for this piece. It's the Holy Spirit's job to manage the outcome and change hearts. I know that in today's world, it may feel a little unnerving to tell people about Jesus. If you feel this way, I want to encourage you to start by sharing your story. Tell about how Jesus has helped you, comforted you, met you, or changed you. Sharing your story with another person is almost always welcomed. Finally, as one last source of encouragement, don't forget that sharing Jesus with another person is an extraordinary act of love. If they choose to accept his invitation, their life will be forever better for meeting him.

After Andrew brought Simon to Jesus, Simon's life was forever changed. To signify this change, he was given a new name.

Naming is significant in Scripture. New names signify a new identity. God renamed Abram to Abraham (Genesis 17:5) to signify that Abraham would be the "father of many." A few verses later God changed the name of Abraham's wife, Sarai, to Sarah to signify that she would be the mother of many nations (Genesis 17:15–16). In Genesis 35, God renamed Jacob to Israel to signify that a nation will come from him. And here Simon is renamed to Cephas, which is Aramaic, and when translated to Greek becomes Peter. Both Peter and Cephas mean *rock*.

6. Knowing that naming signifies a new identity, what do you think Jesus was communicating to Peter about who he would become? (See also Matthew 16:18.)



"We all have names; but each name is exclusive to each of us. We're named, not numbered, at our birth and baptism. Naming is honoring. Naming is choosing."¹

Eugene Peterson



This is one of my favorite moments in Peter's life. Peter met Jesus for the very first time and Jesus told him who he was, "You are Simon son of John" and then told him who he would become, "You will be called Cephas" (John 1:42). He essentially said "You are common" and "You will be a rock." I deeply love this about Jesus—just like with Peter, he sees who we are and

who we will be. So, who will you be? Ask Jesus to help you follow him so you can fully become the person you should be, just like Peter did.

PRACTICE REMINDER

If you haven't already, take some time to do the Lectio Divina process with one of the passages listed in the practice section.



Day 3

Miracles and Other Lessons

Read John 2:1–11.

Just before this passage (John 1:43–51) we learn that Jesus also called Philip and Nathanael to become disciples. These two were added to the original three—Simon Peter, Andrew, and John the Apostle—and brought the total to five disciples.

These five men followed Jesus and began to learn from him. They traveled together to Cana in Galilee and attended a wedding. It's hard for us to understand, but when the wedding host ran out of wine, it was a serious faux pas and would have reflected very poorly upon the family. Jesus's mother, Mary, came to Jesus with the problem. Jesus at first seemed resistant to helping, but then did help and with extravagance. This is Jesus's first recorded miracle—turning water into wine.



“Why would this be the inaugural act? Why would Jesus, to convey what he had come to do, choose to turn 150 gallons of water into superb wine in order to keep a party going? The answer is that Jesus came to bring festival joy. He is the real, the true ‘Master of the Banquet,’ the Lord of the Feast.”²

Timothy Keller

.....

7. In the verse below circle what Jesus revealed through the miracle. Underline the result.

“This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.” (John 2:11 NLT)

What do you think it means that Jesus’s glory was revealed?

8. Pause for a moment and imagine what witnessing this miracle might have been like. Remember, you’ve never seen anything like this before. If you were Peter, what might you have been thinking about Jesus?

As we will discover, the disciples did believe in Jesus, and yet they did not *fully* understand who he was. They were just starting their discipleship journey and with it the discovery of who Jesus was and what he had come to do.

9. Have you ever witnessed something that felt like a miracle to you? If so, what happened? Is it hard for you to call this thing a miracle? Why or why not?

10. Think back to the first time you believed in Jesus. What was it that made you believe? How has your understanding of Jesus changed as you've gotten to know him more? If you don't yet believe that Jesus is God's Son sent to save us, what do you think of him right now? What questions or hesitations do you have about him?

11. In our practice section I listed three passages that we wouldn't be able to cover thoroughly. These are three additional episodes that Peter and the other new disciples got to experience with Jesus. Each taught them something more about the man they were following. Next to the passage you read and reflected on, write what you think Peter learned about Jesus. If you have time, choose one additional passage to read, and write what you think Peter learned.

Passage 1: John 2:12–22, Jesus cleared the temple

Passage 2: John 3:1–21, Jesus taught Nicodemus

Passage 3: John 4:1–27, Jesus interacted with the Samaritan woman

PRACTICE REMINDER

If you haven't already, take some time to do the Lectio Divina process with one of the passages listed in the practice section.



Day 4

Leave Everything Behind

Read Luke 5:1–11.

Piecing together the Gospel accounts can get a little tricky. Each of the four Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) told the Gospel story from a slightly different perspective and thus emphasized different aspects of the story. They also followed their cultural norms of storytelling, which doesn't value chronological order nearly as much as our culture does. Nevertheless, the Gospel stories, while sometimes hard to put in exact order, are still the inerrant Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit. This means that when we run up against something that seems contradictory, it is a good idea to do a little more research to try to understand what is really happening.

With this in mind, if you read the calling accounts in each of the four Gospels (Matthew 4:18–20; Mark 1:16–18; Luke 5:1–11; and John 1:40–42), you will notice that there are two distinctly different stories about Peter's calling. How do we reconcile these very different accounts? I think the best way is to understand that Peter was invited to follow Jesus two different times. The first calling, which we read about in the beginning of this lesson (John 1:40–42), led Peter and the others to follow Jesus for a short time. Peter then seemed to return to his regular life as a fisherman and husband. Scholars think it was about a year later when Jesus saw Peter and his brother Andrew fishing and called them again to follow him.

12. Using the dialogue boxes below, retell what each person said (or what you think they would have said) in your own words based on Luke 5:1–11.

Jesus

Simon

Jesus

Simon

Jesus

Simon

In this account we learn that Peter had worked hard fishing all night and returned empty-handed. By fishing at night, Peter was following the best fishing practices of his time. When Jesus asked Peter to go against this best practice and take the boat into deep water during the day, it would have seemed a foolish waste of energy. And yet, tired as I'm sure he was, he did as Jesus told him.

13. Have you ever felt God ask you to do something or place you in a circumstance that didn't seem to make sense? What happened?

Multiple times in my life I've felt like God invited me to do something that seemed a bit counterintuitive. Recently this happened in a big way as the Lord seemed to be nudging me to leave my career and pastoral role at my church. To be honest, it felt a little like an invitation to jump off a cliff. This is a role I've loved and held for almost thirteen years. Feeling the prompting to move away felt confusing—plus, I had no idea what he might want to move me toward.

This nudge from the Spirit thrust me into a pretty intense season of discernment. The last thing I wanted to do was make a life-changing decision without being certain it was what God wanted. In this season, I spent a lot of extra time journaling my prayers. This helped me slow down so I could capture my thoughts, questions, and fears in one place. It also helped me create space to be still and listen to God. Over the weeks, as I read my journal back to myself, I started to see patterns emerging that seemed like little arrows pointing me to make this move. Another thing I did was seek wise counsel from people who know and love Jesus and me. At every turn I was receiving confirmation that it was time for me to make the shift.

This process took me quite some time to move through. And even when I knew it was the right thing to do, it still felt like a huge leap of faith.

As I write this, the move is still fresh for me. God has been gentle and kind to me in this season of invitation to a new unknown. I want to encourage you that if God is nudging you, take some space to really reflect and discern what he seems to be saying. And if all signs seem to point to him wanting you to make a change, then take the leap of faith. While I don't know how my story ends quite yet, I feel the peace of God surrounding me as I've stepped out in faith to follow his lead.

14. What two responses did Peter have after he caught such a large number of fish (Luke 5:8–9)? Why do you think he wanted Jesus to go away from him?

Through this miraculous catch of fish, Peter caught a glimpse of Jesus's holiness, and in that moment became acutely aware of how sinful he truly was. It's important to pause here and note that Jesus called Peter to follow him while Peter was still a sinner. He does the same for us. We are not called to clean ourselves up before we start following Jesus. The idea that we could make ourselves presentable to God before we come to faith is theologically inaccurate, anyway. Scripture is clear that Jesus died for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8) and the only way we are made right in God's sight is through our faith in Jesus (Romans 3:23–24; Ephesians 2:8–9). When we begin to grasp just how much Jesus gave for us, we will find ourselves responding like Peter did at the end of this experience.

15. In the end, what did Peter do as a result of this encounter with Jesus (Luke 5:11)? Do you really think he left everything? Why or why not?

16. When you first became a follower of Jesus, was there anything that you had to leave behind so you could follow him? If so, what?

17. Is there anything you feel like you need to leave behind so you can follow Jesus more intentionally today? Take a moment to pray and ask God to show you if there is anything he wants you to change or give up. If something comes to mind, capture it below. If it's a big change, seek out a wise Christian friend who will intentionally pray with you about this.

PRACTICE REMINDER

If you haven't already, take some time to do the Lectio Divina process with one of the passages listed in the practice section.



Day 5

Different Priorities

Read Mark 1:21–39.

Today we are going to shift our focus to the Gospel of Mark to discover one of the first and most important lessons Jesus taught Peter. This lesson will come up again and again.

In this passage Jesus was with his disciples Peter (who is called Simon in this passage), Andrew, James, and John the Apostle. They went to Capernaum where Jesus entered the synagogue and began to teach.



The Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark, who was close to Peter. Most Bible scholars believe that John Mark wrote the book based on Peter's preaching. Because of this it is sometimes considered Peter's Gospel.



18. Fill in the table below based on the verses.

Verse	Location	What Jesus Did	Response of the People
Mark 1:21–22	Synagogue in Capernaum	Taught	Amazed because he taught with authority
Mark 1:23–28			
Mark 1:29–31			
Mark 1:32–34			No response is recorded

All of these events seemed to happen on the same day. It was early on the Sabbath when they went to the synagogue, and then once the sun had set and the Sabbath was officially over, Mark tells us that the people brought the sick and demon possessed for healing (Mark 1:32–34). Since people didn't arrive before night-fall, it's safe to assume it was a long and late night for Jesus, the disciples, and Peter's entire household.

The next morning Peter woke up and couldn't find Jesus. Peter finally found Jesus, alone and in prayer.

19. Why do you think Jesus went to pray? What were some things he had to put aside so he could spend this time alone in prayer? (Consider what's implied in the text, but also what you think.)



Scripture tells us that Jesus frequently retreated to be alone and pray. Some of the times we see him do this are in Mark 6:46, 14:32–38; and Luke 5:15–16.



20. Take an honest inventory of your prayer life over the last few weeks. What are some things that tend to distract you from prayer? Brainstorm and write down a few practical things you could do that would help you keep prayer as a priority in your life. Choose one and make a plan to try it over the next few days.

I've heard the question, "Why did Jesus, who was fully God and fully man, need to pray?" It's an interesting question. After all, since he is God, wouldn't it be like he's just talking to himself? Well, not really. Philippians 2:5–11 tells us that when Jesus became a man, he humbled himself and took on a human form. This means that he had to learn how to live in obedience to God as a human being, just like we do. When Jesus prayed, he was spending time with his Father, God. He was seeking his will, being encouraged, strengthened, guided—and so much more. I think the bottom line for us is that if Jesus needed this time with the Father, how much more do we?

When Simon Peter finally found Jesus he exclaimed, "Everyone is looking for you!" (Mark 1:37). Given the activities of the previous night, it seemed word had spread around town and more people wanted healing. Simon Peter appeared to think this was reasonable and expected Jesus to come back and continue his healing ministry. But Jesus had different plans.

21. How did Jesus respond to Simon Peter (Mark 1:38)? Why do you think Jesus wanted to preach instead of physically heal? How do you think his time in prayer affected his decision and response to Simon Peter?

22. At the end of each lesson, I will invite you to capture the main lessons you think Peter may have learned about what it meant to be a disciple. I want to encourage you not to overthink this. There are no exact right answers. In fact, many weeks will have multiple answers. The intention is for you to look back over the weekly questions and ask yourself what you think Peter learned. If you're doing this study in a group, I hope you will be encouraged by both the variety of answers and the underlying similarities.

So, let's give it a try. The main discipleship lessons I think Peter learned were:

Now, I'd like to ask you to prayerfully consider what you think the Lord wants you to remember most from this lesson. Flip back through this week's questions, including the practice section, and see what the Lord helps you notice. Ask yourself questions like: Did I learn something new? Do I feel like God is inviting me to trust or follow him in a new way? Is there a change I need to make? Or is there something else he seems to be drawing my attention to? Capture your thoughts here.

My takeaways are:

