

Discussion:

1. Who had recently arrived in Jerusalem? (Acts 11:30)
2. What did Herod do to the believers? (12:1 – 3)
3. What does John 21:18 mean? Why is it possible that Peter might have remembered this?
4. Did Peter begin to be afraid as he did when he was walking on water?
5. What was he doing the night before his planned execution?
6. Acts 12:3. Would you be able to sleep if you were going to be executed the next day? Why is Peter at peace about his future? Can we have this peace when there is a big test the next day?
7. What did the church do when Peter was put in prison? (12:5)
8. How did Peter escape from the prison?
9. Did God's deliverance surprise Peter? Think about this and share recent examples of God's deliverance that you know about.
10. What happened when Peter arrived at the prayer meeting?
Verses 12 -17
11. What did Herod do when he knew Peter had gone?
12. What finally happened to Herod? (v.23)
13. Imagine you were Barnabas and Saul taking news back to Antioch.
Verse 25. What would you say?

Prayer:

Help us to trust you and not to worry when we get ourselves into difficult situations. Thank you that you can deliver us.

 We will be seeing more of the transforming work in Peter's life when we go to Peter's first and second letter in the next book. As preparation for the next series of studies in the book "Peter's Teaching". Read: 1 Peter chapters 1 –5

As you read, discover the important teaching in the following verses?

1 Peter 1:11, 2:21, 3:14 – 17, 4:1, 4:12 – 16, 5:1, 5:10-11.

The Changed Life

Peter meets Jesus

By Peter Skinner

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To the reader or group leader

This Bible Commentary on the life of Peter can be used on your own or with others. This book covers readings from the Gospels and Acts. The second book in this series "Peter's Teaching" covers the two letters of Peter. Please study both books. It will get more challenging in the second book. Here are the symbols used.



Read the Bible. It is important to read the Bible passage first before you read each study.



Discuss the issues. Questions that can be asked in a group study. The group leader should look through the study and the questions before the Meeting.



Prayer. A suggested prayer which may help you.

Foreword

"Peter Skinner's commentary is an excellent resource for all who want a clear and concise introduction to the life of the Apostle Peter. The essential subject matter is explained in easily accessible English but without compromising the depth or significance of the particular section explored. The

Study 13

Peter in prison



Read: Acts 12

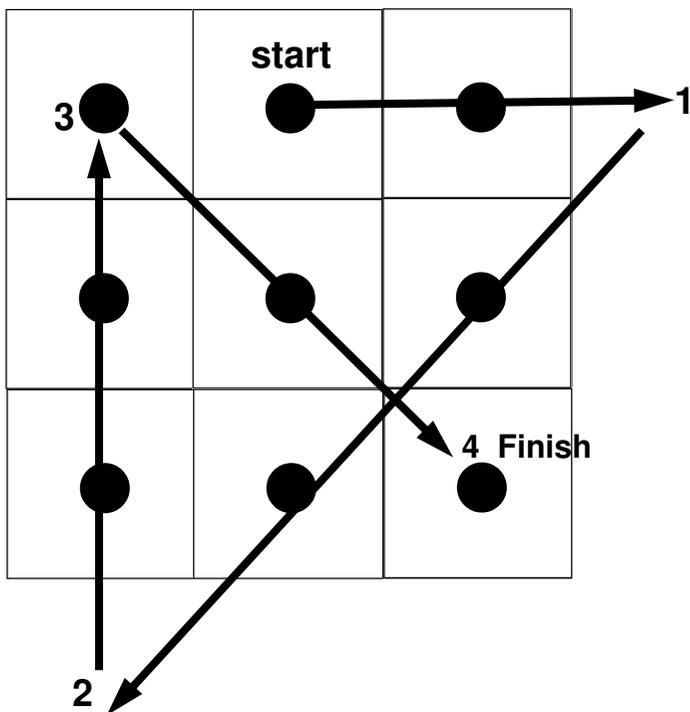
These events took place about 10 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Herod Agrippa who killed the Apostle James, probably by beheading him, was the grandson of Herod the Great (who soon after the birth of Jesus killed the innocent children in Bethlehem). Herod Agrippa's intention was to persecute the church. Peter was arrested and imprisoned. He was chained to two soldiers and another two guarded the gate.

As you read this story, note the amazing change in Peter. He was asleep in prison, an uncomfortable place. He was not worrying about tomorrow (Matthew 6:34). He was not planning his defence in court. Perhaps he thought that this was the time Jesus spoke about in John 21:18. He was prepared to die. But no. The church was praying. God still had a plan for Peter. The angel came and Peter's chains fell off. He got up, put on his clothes and sandals and followed the angel out of prison. When they were out of the prison "they walked" (verse 10) which shows that the angel was in human form, walking like a man. Then suddenly at the end of the street, the angel left. Then Peter realised what had happened. "The Lord sent his angel and rescued me". (verse 11) Even today angels sometimes rescue believers from great danger as they did for Brother Yun who escaped from Zhenqhou prison in China. (Hebrews 1:14)

Peter went to the house of Mary, mother of John, where there were many disciples praying. Rhoda came to the door but did not open it as she should have done. The praying people could not believe it when she told them that it was Peter standing at the door. Finally, they opened the door and when they saw him they were astonished. It is important for the church to pray for those going through a crisis or life threatening situations. God delights to surprise us with answers to our prayers, whether it is for persecuted believers, the victims of horrific accidents, for dangerous surgery in hospital or any other crisis. If you belong to a group that prays, perhaps you can do better than the church in Acts 12 and really believe God for the answer.

Peter told them to tell James and the others, who were not at the prayer meeting, of his escape. He then left to go into hiding. The next time he appears is in Acts 15: 6—11 when he spoke up in the assembly of elders on behalf of the Gentiles influencing the policy making of the church.

Answer



questions are thought-provoking and challenging and will ensure stimulating and lively discussion between individuals or within groups. I recommend this work wholeheartedly in the confidence that users will find it enjoyable, rewarding and a source of great blessing”.

Peter Lupson

“Progress is the only alternative to falling. We must advance or we shall decline. To prevent decay we must grow.” John Wilmot

Introduction

I first discovered value in the life of the Apostle Peter, as it is given us in the Bible, about 40 years ago when I was a student at the Bible College of Wales in Swansea. At that time, the passage in Matthew 14:22 – 36 had special importance for me. It became my favourite passage to speak from when I was sent out to preach in the chapels of South Wales. I had left the security of a good job in London and the monthly pay cheque. I was dependent on God as I prayed for my support. This was especially so during my third year when my savings were used up. It was as if I was walking on the water toward Jesus and every new step of faith took me nearer to Him. This included the times when I was on summer missions.

It was, however, during my third year at BCW that my interest in the story of Peter grew. I chose as my thesis “Truth Via Personality”. Peter was one of those interesting people that I studied.

Now, 40 years later, here in this study are some of the things that God has shown me. This in itself would not be enough, if I had not learned about publishing, in particular for developing countries. This book has to reach you, the reader.

Here is some personal background. God led my wife and me to work in the SOON Ministries offices in Willington, Derbyshire. We were invited by the late Director, John Lewis. After seven years I left SOON and started along a lonely path, working from home. I began publishing the Fred Morris Bible commentaries for people overseas. In this I was helped by David Page whose expertise in editing and publishing became essential for the development of Manna Publications. My main aim in writing this commentary, is to help all readers discover the changed life. To grow as Peter did, from that first encounter with Jesus, toward maturity. The studies start easy and become more difficult. There are discussion questions. These are known to be most useful for those groups eager to find the truth for themselves. By reading, study and group discussion, here is an opportunity to find God and the changed life.

Peter Skinner

Jesus last command was “Go into all the world and preach the good news”. Mark 16:13. Peter knew this but it took revelation from God through a vision for him to go to non-Jews. We can liken this to our game which is only completed by going outside the “box”. Until this time, for any Gentile to come to God, they had to accept Judaism including circumcision. Now it was no longer required for the Gentiles to be circumcised. This issue caused a big debate. To join the lines you must go outside the box. For Peter “the box” meant Jewish believers. Outside the box were Gentiles. (non-Jews). Sometimes we need to think “outside the box” and be prepared to go to other people and nations.



For the next study read: Acts 12

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asked three times by Jesus “Do you love me?”). As he was considering the vision, men from Cornelius (a Roman centurion and a godly man) arrived. Then the Holy Spirit spoke to Peter clearly in his mind, “Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them” (Acts 10:19- 20). This was clear guidance from God.

When Peter and his companions reached Ceasarea, Cornelius was expecting them. He had gathered relatives and close friends to hear what Peter had to say. When Cornelius met Peter, he fell at his feet. Peter quickly told him, “Get up, I also am a man”. When Christian leaders are worshipped the truth is distorted and idolatry takes hold. Had Peter allowed this wrong kind of worship, then his preaching may not have ended that day with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Christian leaders must beware of pride when people flatter them.

Cornelius spoke of the visit of the angel as written in Acts 10:30-33. It was real and clear and he remembered it well. Thus both the vision of Cornelius and the vision of Peter were fulfilled together.

Peter preached. His focus was on Jesus, His life, His death and His resurrection. Peter spoke as a personal witness to it all. He preached with strong belief and God came. The Holy Spirit came on the listeners. The sound of praises to God from the listeners grew, as they spoke in tongues. They believed all that Peter had said. Baptism in the sea at Ceasarea made a good end to the day. Men and woman died to the old life in the waters of baptism. They rose out of the water into new life in Christ. A new church was born. Peter remained there for a few days to do some more teaching.



Discussion:

1. Cornelius was a good religious person who prayed to God and gave generously to the poor. Why then was it necessary for God to send the angel telling him to call Peter?
2. Peter was praying on the rooftop of Simon the tanner’s house. Why did God give him a vision and what did it mean?
3. Read: Acts 10:19-23. Imagine the conversation at the dinner table at Simon the tanner’s house. What could have been said?
4. Acts 10:28-29 Peter struggled to obey because of prejudice and tradition. Are there people that we are prejudiced against? How can we overcome this? Galatians 3:28
5. If you had been Peter, what instruction would you have given Cornelius in the days that followed? Include speaking in tongues? (1 Corinthians 14)
6. Acts 11:2 – 18. How can Peter’s answer to his critics help us?

Study 12

Peter and Cornelius



Read Acts 10:1-11:18

Peter struggled with guidance in this story. He was a Jew. He did not associate with non-Jews. Nor did his Jewish friends. “You are well aware that it is against our Law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him” (Acts 10:28). So to go and visit a Roman was very wrong. His friends that went with him from Joppa thought so. They were very much amazed that the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit and could then be baptized. (Acts 10:45). The circumcised believers in Jerusalem criticised Peter (Acts 11:1-3) demanding to know why he went to a house of the “uncircumcised” and shared meals with them. Was Peter wrong to associate with these Gentiles?

A leader must get his guidance from God, obey it against his own and other peoples prejudice. He must be ready afterward to stand up for what is right by declaring openly the guidance given by God. He said, “God has shown me” (Acts 10:28). By obeying what God had shown him and explaining it to his critics he silenced them and kept unity (Acts 11:18). If a leader gets it wrong and does something without the clear guidance of God, he will not be able to answer his critics. They will separate themselves causing division. This can be very damaging to the church. We must pray for our Christian leaders.

Now we will look at the story more closely. At the time that Peter ministered to Dorcus (also called Tabitha) Peter was staying with Simon the tanner (Acts 9:43). A tanner was involved in treating the skins of dead (unclean) animals. Thus, according to Jewish law, Peter was risking being made unclean and he was probably despised for that. Peter’s decision to stay with him shows already a willingness to reject Jewish prejudice. It helped to prepare the way for his coming vision and the mission to the Gentiles. Peter was on the roof top when he received the vision.

It was customary at that time for houses in that region to have flat roofs with outside stairways. The roof was used as a place for relaxation and privacy. It was here that God gave Peter the vision of a sheet coming down from heaven with clean and unclean animals. A voice said, “Get up Peter, kill and eat”. So deeply within him was the observance of the law, of clean and unclean, that Peter refused to obey immediately. The vision was repeated three times to emphasize it. (We also remember that Peter denied Jesus three times and the cock crowed. When restored by Jesus he was

Study 1

Meeting Jesus

We begin this series of studies by following the life of Peter, in the Gospels, and afterwards in Acts. We discover how Jesus can change us as he changed Peter.



Read John 1:41-42

⁴¹The first thing Andrew did then was to find his brother Simon. He said, “We have found the Messiah!” (Messiah means the Christ, the anointed one of God.) ⁴²Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon, the son of John. Your name will be Cephas”.

Andrew had some very exciting news to tell his brother Simon Peter. He had found the Messiah. He brought Peter to Jesus. Very little is written about Andrew in the Gospels but much is written about Peter. When we find God for ourselves and get excited about Him, it will be natural for us to tell a relative or friend so that they too can find Him. Sometimes that person will have more influence than we will ever have.

Peter’s family home had been in Bethsaida but he had settled with his wife in Capernaum. Both were on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee where fish were plentiful. Peter grew up in a mixed language area where Greek and the local language, Aramaic, were used. Andrew called Peter “Simon” (v.41) Jesus gave him the name Cephas. Cephas means rock or stone. When Jesus used this word he made people notice it by translating it into Aramaic. It usually appears in the New Testament in the Greek form “Petros” (Peter).

When Jesus met Peter, he looked at him and said, “**You are ...you shall be**”. Peter was an outgoing, talkative and likeable man, who spoke or acted before he had thought things through and often said the wrong thing at the wrong time. Although he could not always be depended on, Jesus saw in Peter what by God’s grace he could become – a leader on whom others would depend. Jesus sees our potential and what we can become if we follow His Word.



Read Matthew 4:18-20

Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee. There he saw two brothers, Simon who later was named Peter, and his brother Andrew. They were throwing a fishing-net into the water. ¹⁹Jesus said to them, “Come with me. The work I will give you to do will be to catch people”. ²⁰Right away

they left their nets and went with Him.

Peter and Andrew worked together as fishermen. Jesus called them both while at work saying “The work I will give you to do will be to catch people” (or as other Bible versions say “make you fishers of men”). This was fulfilled in the book of Acts after they had received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:41). So Peter became one of twelve disciples who became followers of Jesus. Just as Peter learnt to follow Jesus with the other disciples so we should learn with others in the context of our local church.

 **Discussion**

1. What is the most likely reason that Peter was also called Simon and why did Jesus call him Cephas?
2. Can you think of an example of introducing someone to Jesus who was later to become a Christian leader?
3. Jesus said to Peter “You are... you shall be”. What single word would have described you before you met Jesus? What single word would describe you now? Discuss how knowing Jesus has changed you.
4. Jesus spoke about becoming “fishers of men”. What are the skills of the fisherman and how can this help bring people to Jesus?
5. Peter learnt to follow Jesus along with other disciples. Why is it not good to be alone and how do other people in local church help us?
6. Jesus found Andrew and Andrew found Simon Peter. Share with the group any difficulties you had in finding God for the first time. If you have found God, share your story to help any in the group who are still seeking.

 **For the next study read: Matthew 14: 22-33.**

3. Can situations paralyse our action? What is the answer?
4. Compare the story of Tabitha with Mark 5:35-43. What things are similar and what things are different?
5. Is it possible to believe God for answers even when the situation seems to have gone beyond the point of recovery?



Prayer:

Help me to trust in you, even when facing the impossible.

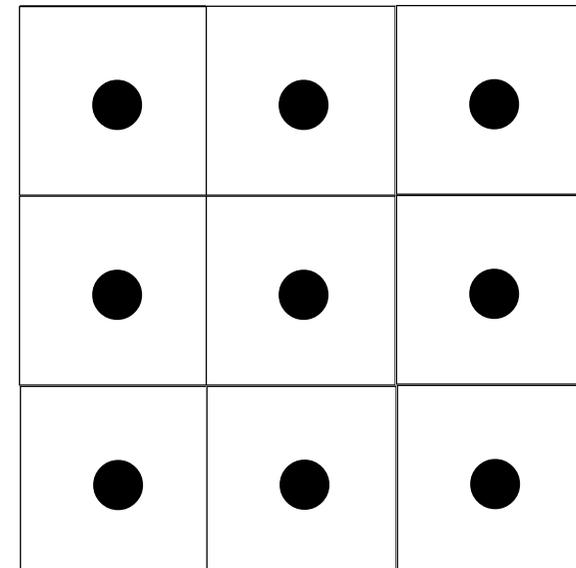


For next week read: Acts 10

GAME

Take a pencil and join every dot using only four straight lines, AND without taking your pencil off the paper.

Try doing this before you look at the answer at the end of the next lesson.



Study 11

Wider Ministry



Read Acts 9:32-43

Up until now we have only seen Peter in a leadership position with the apostles in Jerusalem. These verses look at Peter in a wider ministry throughout the country. Joppa, on the coast, was about 38 miles from Jerusalem and Lydda was about 12 miles from Joppa. It was while visiting believers in Lydda that Peter came across Aeneas. He was a paralysed man who had been in bed for eight years. He did not pray for him, but spoke boldly in the name of Jesus telling him to get up and walk. The paralysed man walked and many believed because of this. Miracles like this can happen today. Some evangelists record such miracles happening as they preach the Gospel to large crowds. Another way of applying this story is by remembering that sometimes we can be paralysed because of what people have said or done to us. That makes us feel unable to fulfil our duties. We know there is something we should do but we are unable to do it. At such times God will give us bold faith so that we can stand against the problem in the name of Jesus, or God will bring along a mature Christian leader who will be available to minister to us and release us.

Peter shows both compassion and boldness in faith when faced with the death of Tabitha. The mourners were already there and Peter was shown the clothes made by Tabitha when she was alive. Peter asked the mourners to leave the room and got down on his knees and prayed. He put out unbelief and in the quiet prayed until he knew what God was saying in this situation. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up". This command woke the dead. He helped her to her feet and presented her alive to the widows and believers. Because of this many people believed in the Lord as this story became known in Joppa. We might be faced with situations that have gone too far in peoples' lives. In the quiet we must pray and hear God. Then we will know what to speak and do and He will bring life again.



Discussion:

1. What do these stories show us about Peter's wider ministry?
2. What can we learn from the way Peter spoke to the paralysed man? (See also: Matthew 21:18-22)

Study 2

Walking on water

Often an encounter with Jesus will happen in a time of difficulty. Jesus will come to us supernaturally in the midst of our problem. He came to the disciples in this way. It was when they were trying to cross the lake by boat and the wind was against them. Here Peter proved his faith in Jesus more than the other disciples did.

JESUS' TWELVE DISCIPLES (Mark 3:13-19)

Simon from Bethsaida, a fisherman. Jesus gave him the name **Peter** or **Cephas** (a rock).

Andrew, Peter's brother (John 1:40).

James, son of Zebedee, called 'James the elder' and

John, his brother

Philip, who went and found

Nathanael, also called **Bartholomew** (John 1:43).

Thomas (John 11:16; 14:5).

James, son of Alphaeus, or 'James the younger' (Mark 15:40).

Matthew, the publican or tax collector also called **Levi** (Matthew 10:2).

Thaddaeus, also called **Judas**.

Simon the Zealot (Luke 6:15)

Judas Iscariot who later betrayed Jesus.



Read: Matthew 14:22-36 (N.I.V.)

Jesus Walks on the Water (Verses 25—33)

²⁵During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost", they said, and cried out in fear. ²⁷But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ²⁸"Lord, if it's you", Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." ²⁹"Come", He said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," He said, "why did you doubt?" ³²And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³Then those who were in the boat worshipped Him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

The Walk of Faith

The story of Jesus walking on water is a picture of His sinless life. Jesus experienced the ups and downs of life but he never sank into sin. Nor was he afraid of the waves or of getting lost in the dark in an open expanse of stormy water. He was coming to help the disciples he had been praying for on the mountain. Their boat was making little progress due to the wind being against them.

Jesus can come to us while we struggle with things that come against us and in any difficulty. He can come supernaturally to a whole group of his followers, perhaps causing them to fear. It is His word that calms fear. "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid." The words "it is I" can be better translated "I AM". The great "I AM" Almighty God in human form was walking on the waves. When He speaks, our fear of the supernatural is calmed.

"Lord, if it is you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water". "Come" He said. Peter stepped out on the word of God. He left behind the comparative security of the boat and the presence of his friends. His walk depended on one thing – looking to Jesus. After beginning well, Peter began to look at the waves. He became frightened and began to sink. Peter's walk failed. This is a picture of Peter's life in the Gospels. Then he immediately cried out to Jesus with one of the shortest prayers in the Bible. "Lord save me". Jesus was near enough both to hear and to help and he did so.



Sometimes in times of trouble or sickness we can be overcome because the situation is so bad. Jesus wants us to trust Him in the bad times, but if we fail, we can still cry out to Him. We then find that He is near to us, both to hear and to help. He will lift us up and we will walk with Him again.

In Acts 2, Peter "walks on water". He and the other disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit. When the supernatural experience of speaking in tongues came with the Holy Spirit, the listeners did not know what was happening. They were calmed by the anointed preaching of the Word of God through Peter. Thousands believed.

the apostles out of prison and told them to continue teaching in the Temple Courts. They did this at daybreak and were later re-arrested.

Peter is mentioned specifically (verse 29) along with the other apostles (we are not sure how many) as he was clearly the spokesman for them. Their message to the Sanhedrin was firm and strong which made the Jews furious. Only the wise words of Gamaliel prevented their execution. They were beaten but rejoiced at suffering disgrace for the Name of Jesus.



Discussion:

1. Read: Acts 5:3 – 10. Ananias and Sapphira tried to deceive. They wanted to appear more generous than they really were. Discuss in what situations we are tempted to deceive.
2. How did Peter uncover the deception?
3. When someone comes with a very good story in order to get money, how can we uncover deception?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 and discuss what has happened to these religious people. How would you know they are not as they appear to be?
5. Persecution followed blessing. In what ways was God with them in all that happened?.
6. Read: Acts 5:40-42 What happened here and what does this teach us?



Prayer:

Lord, forgive me when I have tried to deceive. Help me to be honest in all I do and to trust you for your provision if things do not appear to work out well.



For the next study read: Acts 9:32-43

Study 10

Deception



Read Acts 5

Peter uncovered deception in Ananias and Sapphira and because of this they died. It brought a great fear into the church. No one from this moment would dare deceive.

Church leaders must uncover deception. If they don't, deception will grow and the Church will get a bad name. Church leaders must discipline members who are found to be deceiving others. Sometimes when it is about money church leaders see an advantage for themselves and so become a part of the deception. In such a case leaders need to repent and seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter was not concerned about money but about honesty and purity in the church. (1 Peter 5:2)

Deception is easy, at least to start with. Children learn to lie rather than admit their guilt over some bad action. Sex is a strong reason for deception. The person says "no one will know what I am doing". It leads to trouble and the injured person can be damaged for life. Pastors must not only be clean themselves from wrong sexual involvement but also discern when others hide their guilty life. Jacob, the deceiver (Genesis 27:35-36), became the deceived (Genesis 37:31-36). This could happen to us. God disciplined Jacob and later he became a godly man and no longer tried to deceive others.

Despite this setback in Acts, the blessing continued when they met in Solomon's Colonnade (verse 12). This was a roofed area along the inner side of the wall enclosing the outer court of the temple. It had rows of 27 foot high stone columns and a roof of cedar wood. However, it did not date back to Solomon's time.

Peter was in unity with the other disciples and highly respected. Many new believers were added to the Church. The anointing of the Holy Spirit on Peter overflowed so that when he walked along the street even his shadow passing over some sick person could heal them. Crowds came from towns outside Jerusalem and those troubled by bad spirits were healed. (verse 16)

"The Sadducees were filled with jealousy." They were jealous because of the large following the apostles had gained through their teaching. They arrested them and put them in prison. Then the angel of the Lord brought



Discussion

1. If Jesus walking on water is a picture of his sinless life (See 1 Peter 2:22) how can this help us? How can we walk "on top" of difficulties and not sink?
2. When Jesus walked on the water, do you think he got wet? Discuss. Depending on your answer to this question, discuss how we are affected in our walk of faith by what is around us. Can we expect to "get wet"?
3. Can Jesus come to us when we are overworked, when under pressure or when we are sick? If you have had an experience of Jesus when He has come to you in the midst of a problem, share it with the group.
4. What was the reaction of the disciples when they saw Jesus on the water? How can we know if a supernatural experience is from God? (Acts 2).
5. What did Jesus say to Peter, when Peter asked if he could go to Him on the water? (verse 29). Share with the group how a word from God to you has helped you step out.
6. Discuss "stepping out of the boat" on short term mission. Why can this be such a positive experience?
7. When Peter stepped out of the boat, he walked because of the Word Jesus had spoken to him. What caused him to sink? What problems in life cause us to doubt God?
8. How was he saved from drowning? How can his experience help us?
9. Peter, who had been lifted out of the water by Jesus, walked with Jesus. Our "walk" is our way of life, so how should we walk? See Romans 8:5, Galatians 5:16, Eph 4:17, 5:2
10. What did the disciples do when Jesus and Peter got into the boat?(v.33)



Prayer from the book of common worship.

Go before us, Lord, in all we do with your most gracious favour, and guide us with your continual help, that in all our works begun, continued and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name ... through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



**For the next lesson read: Luke 5:1-11 and Luke 8:49-56.
Acts 9:36-43**

Study 3

Fishing, Fact & Faith

Walking on water toward Jesus is a picture of a life of faith. We look to Jesus and He supports our walk amidst the storms of life. Here are some other ways in which Peter walked toward Jesus.



Read: Luke 5:1-11

1. Fishing: Loaning a boat to Jesus.

Peter loaned his boat to Jesus and listened to what Jesus said from his boat to the people. He obeyed Jesus although he was doubtful when asked to go fishing. He was amazed at the number of fish caught. He fell at Jesus' knees saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Many years later Peter wrote, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time". 1 Peter 5:6. God is not pleased with self centred, self righteous people. Luke 18:9-14. Jesus said, "Don't be afraid, from now on you will catch men". That was to be more of a miracle than catching fish. (Acts 2:38-41).

Generosity repaid.

Oliver was a builder. He was the Pastor of an English village Baptist church. He re-built this church. He also owned a large house. A Christian literature organisation called SOON needed a new place to work. Oliver sold them his house at well below the market value. The SOON ministry moved in and the work grew. A new Pastor came to the Baptist Chapel when Oliver retired. Oliver bought a smaller house for himself and his family. He was contented with what he had. (see Hebrews 13:5). God blessed Oliver's family and his retirement years. He lived to 97 years of age.



Read: Matthew 16:13-23.

2. Fact: Who Jesus really is.

In Matthew 16:13-23, Jesus asked Peter "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Peter spoke out "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus is pleased with this answer because

- ◆ God had revealed this to Peter
- ◆ It was a public confession

voice spoke for them all: "Sovereign Lord" it began. It continued by expressing the sovereignty of God, seen in creation, in prophetic words spoken through King David and in recent events through Herod and Pontius Pilate. "They did what your power and will had earlier decided should happen". This declaration of God's sovereignty came before any request. Here then is a way to effective prayer. First, they meditated on all that God had done. Then they reminded God of the threats against them. They asked for boldness in speaking the Word and that God would stretch out his hand to heal and perform miraculous signs. Then God shook the place, and "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly". Their prayer had been answered.



Discussion:

1. Imagine you were preaching outside and the police came and put you in jail. Would you be worried? How could the example of the apostles help?
2. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit when he answered his accusers. Can God help us in difficult situations? Can we also be filled with the Holy Spirit? (John 14:16-18)
3. Read Acts 4:13. What amazes the religious leaders?
4. Are there times when obeying God goes against obeying people? Suggest some examples.
5. The believers all prayed at the same time. Some believers in Africa do this but not all saying the same words. Should we do this in church today?
6. What can we learn from the emphasis in prayer on the sovereignty of God?
7. Why didn't they pray that God would stop the persecution?
8. How do we know their prayer was heard?



Prayer:

Lord, give me courage and wisdom that I may declare your wonderful salvation to the people you lead me to today.



For the next study read: Acts 5

Study 9

Boldness



Read Acts 4

Peter's preaching was stopped by the religious officials who seized him and John. They took them away and put them in jail. Among the religious people were the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection. Yet the preaching of the resurrection was so effective that several thousand more men believed. (verse 4). During the night in jail they were aware of the presence of Jesus as they discussed the day and praised God. (Acts 16:25). They probably slept too because they were trusting God.

(Acts 12:6)



The next morning when Peter and John were questioned by the religious leaders and rulers they answered with great boldness. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. (verse 8). We could ask if this is the same Peter who denied his Lord in Luke 22:60–62. Even the religious leaders “saw the courage of Peter and John ... and took note that these men had been with Jesus”. They were critical. They did not rejoice over the miraculous healing of the crippled man. Their own authority was threatened. So they warned them not to teach any more in Jesus' Name. Peter answered

boldly again. He asked them to judge whether it was more important to obey them or God. (Acts 4:18-20). The man who had been healed had found his way to the room where Peter and John were being questioned. He stood with them. His testimony was undeniable as he had been crippled for over 40 years. (4:22) Finally the apostles were released.

Peter and John went back to their own people. The report that Peter and John gave to the gathering was such that immediately all the believers “raised their voices together in prayer”. It must have been noisy. Then one

- ◆ It was the rock on which the future church would be built

After this Jesus told Peter about his future suffering. Peter did not like this and started to speak against Jesus. But Jesus rebuked him. Peter could not understand the necessity of suffering until after the resurrection.



Read: Luke 8:49–56: Faith: Child raised from death.

Peter, James and John saw Jesus raise a young girl of 12 years of age from death. These three disciples were the “inner circle” of the twelve. Most churches have an inner group of committed leaders, usually called elders. They understand more fully what is happening, and take responsibility. Jesus told her sad father “only believe”. He did not allow the people who were mourning and weeping to come into the room. He ignored their mockery. He spoke with authority “My child, get up!” Her spirit returned and she stood up. He told her parents to give her food.



Discussion

1. Peter was willing to let Jesus use his boat as a platform. Jesus could then speak to the people without them crowding Him. Discuss ways by which things we possess can be used by God so others are blessed.
2. How did Jesus reward Peter and the disciples? Does he reward us today when we give so that others may hear?
3. Peter said to Jesus, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man”. What do you think made him react like this? What does God promise to those who humble themselves? (See Luke 18:14)
4. Peter spent time with Jesus and discovered who He really was. How can we spend time with Jesus so we discover who He really is?
5. Luke 8:49-56. Jesus took three disciples, Peter, John and James into the room where he raised Jairus' daughter from death. What was this “inner circle” of disciples expected to learn from this experience?



Prayer. A suggested prayer which may help you.

I come to you O God, remembering that you are holy and I am sinful. I thank you that you forgive my sins and that I can overcome impossible situations in my life. I give myself to you, and know that you are with me.



Read for the next study: Luke 22:31-36, Luke 22:54-62, Romans 7: 21-24.

Study 4

Beginning to sink

Heavy rain that causes rivers to overflow brings enormous pressure on man-made bridges and houses often causing them to fall down. This happened in Cumbria, England in 2009 where three bridges fell down on the rivers Cocker and Derwent. It happened on a far bigger scale in Pakistan in 2010 and again in 2011 affecting more than a million people. In the village of Okara, the water caused several houses to collapse and the owners lost everything.

God wants our faith in Him to be strong and not to fall down under pressure. Jesus told a story about the wise man who built his house on rock and the foolish man who built his house upon sand. (Matthew 7:24–31) In times of trouble it is important to have built a strong relationship with God, otherwise it will collapse under pressure. When Jesus was arrested and taken to be judged, Peter was very frightened by the opposition. He denied Jesus three times. His weakness was clearly seen. Only the prayer of Jesus saved Peter from complete failure (Luke 22:32). Later he was restored by Jesus. (John 21:17)



Read: Luke 22:31-38, 54-62, Romans 7: 21-24,

The sieve and the sword.



A sieve

Jesus spoke to Peter (Luke 22:31) saying that Satan desired to sift him as wheat. It would have been a well-known illustration as it is in many rural areas of Africa today. The newly cut wheat would be violently shaken. The chaff was blown away leaving only the wheat. Peter was about to be shaken by Satan. Early on in Bible times Satan was allowed by God to test Job (Job 1:6-12). Job's life was ruined but he still trusted God. Satan wants to destroy us. What prevented this happening in Peter's life was the prayer of Jesus. "But I have prayed for you". He also spoke prophetic words into Peter's life "When you have turned back, strengthen your brethren". Pastors and leaders should learn not only to pray for their people, but also learn how to speak positive prophetic words from God into their lives.

Study 8

Healing



Read Acts 3

The believers met often for prayer but one day something happened on the way to their usual prayer meeting. They were ready for it. Peter and John were moving in God's anointing. They may have seen the crippled man at Gate Beautiful many times but this time was different. Speaking to the crippled man Peter said "Look at us". The man thought that a lot of money was coming to him. But no, it was something better—healing in the Name of Jesus. It was human and divine action at the same time. Peter spoke the word and pulled the man up. God instantly healed him. Only those moving in God's anointing can do things like this. This became an 'advertisement' for God, "When all the people saw...they came running" (verses 10-11). It is not often that people run to the place where Christians meet. Then Peter preached giving glory to God for the miracle. He referred his mainly Jewish listeners to Moses. (verse 22-23, Deut 18:18-19). He spoke of the death of Christ and His resurrection which had happened some months ago near that place.

This healing then was evidence that Christ had risen as it took place in His Name. Peter understood that the people may have opposed Christ because they did not know any better. (verse 17). He then called them to repentance. This would be a blessing because it would "turn each of you away from your wicked ways". (verse 26) The Bible says everyone has sinned (Romans 3:23). We all need to repent.



Discussion

1. Is it good to have regular times to meet other believers to pray? If so why? Acts 3:1
2. Why is it that Peter was so sure of himself and what he was doing? Can this happen today? Discuss.
3. Read: Acts 3:12-16. What did Peter tell the crowd?
4. What important Old Testament person does he speak about and why? (Verse 21-23)
5. Why did Peter preach repentance and not healing?
6. Does God still heal today? Discuss.



For the next study read: Acts 4

here). So praising God was normal. The Believers who had property and goods sold them so that the poor could be fed and clothed. This developed into a daily programme of food distribution. (Acts 6:1).

Discussion:

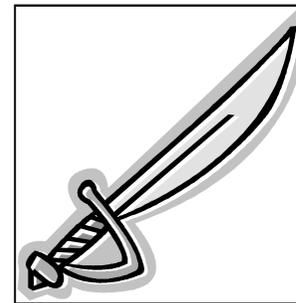
1. Acts 2:1-4 was awesome. God came. Can this happen today? Discuss.
2. What must we do if we want to be filled with the Holy Spirit? (Matt 5:6, John 7:37)
3. Read: Acts 2:14–37. Peter preached boldly. Compare James 3:6-8. What do we notice about the tongue in comparing these scriptures?
4. How many times does Peter use the words from the Old Testament? What does this show us about Peter?
5. Do you agree that Acts 2:33 is a key verse in Acts. If so why?
6. Why are the four things mentioned in Acts 2:42 important? How can we avoid them becoming cold everyday actions? Discuss.
7. Generosity and caring for the poor were a part of the early church's ministry. In what ways can we follow this example today?

 **Prayer:** *Lord, I am thirsty for you. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit.*

 **For the next study read: Acts 3**

“Lord” said Peter, “I am willing to go with you to prison and to death”. Jesus warned him “Before the cock crows today, you will deny three times that you know Me” (Luke 22:34). Peter was sincere, loyal and wanted to do well. He was determined to follow Jesus even if he were arrested, imprisoned and condemned to death. Many of us want to do good things in life but we sometimes fail. We need to change from “self for self” to “self for others”.

Paul in Romans 7:18. said, “I want to do what is good, but I cannot do it”. This was similar for Peter as we shall see. He would not be able to withstand the hostility of those who had decided to condemn Jesus, and His followers. (Luke 22: 54 – 62). Peter had not yet learned about the necessity for prayer and the change of our nature that makes us “self for others” rather than “self for self”. So Jesus warned him “Before the cock crows today, you will deny three times that you know Me”. Luke 22:34. This was to be a painful experience for Peter. Likewise our good intentions often fail when pressures overwhelm. We say that we will never be angry, yet some people cause us to be angry by what they say. We say we will never steal, but find there is not enough money to pay our bills. Taking someone else's money is so easy. We say we will never lie, but excuse ourselves with small lies to get out of trouble. We say we will be loyal to our wife/husband but sin is so attractive. Later the Apostle Paul described it as “sin living in me”. Romans 7:20



Why does Jesus tell his disciples to buy a sword in Luke 22:36? This is a difficult verse. Jesus did not expect his followers to fight to prevent his arrest so why did He tell them to buy a sword? Perhaps the answer is that He is showing them that times have changed. When Jesus had sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God before (Luke 9:1-6), it was in a time of peace when they could rely on generous hospitality. Now Jesus and His disciples faced opposition so they had to be prepared to buy a weapon. It was an extreme way of warning them that they would need defence and protection as Paul did when he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:11). Caesar was the one who had the sword. (Romans 13:4).

When Jesus was arrested, Peter followed at a distance (Luke 22:54). When we become too busy to pray, read the Bible and hear good teaching in church, then we are following at a distance. When we follow Jesus at a distance we are likely to deny him especially if people around us are hostile. Peter's denial of Jesus was so strong that Matthew tells us “he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them”. Peter wanted to protect his

life. Then the cock crowed and Jesus looked at Peter (Luke 22:60). One look was enough. Words of condemnation were not possible and not necessary. One look from a parent at a misbehaving child should be enough. That child knows when it has done wrong. Peter remembered Jesus' words and went out and wept.

Discussion

1. What does it mean to be sifted as wheat? What is Satan's intention in hard times and what is God's intention? How can prayer help?
2. What was Peter warned about? (Luke 22:33 -34)
3. Peter followed "at a distance" when Jesus was arrested. What happened next? (Luke 22:54 – 62). What does it mean for us to follow at a distance and what is likely to happen to us if we follow Jesus at a distance?
4. Good intentions to be a Christian are not enough. Why?
5. Read Romans 7:21 – 24. How is Peter's problem described here? Do you ever want to do what is right but find it difficult?
6. Describe what Peter felt like after he denied Jesus.

Thought: The personality with the greatest strengths is the personality with the greatest potential weaknesses.

Some members of the group may want to share their particular weaknesses so that the group can pray if you are comfortable with this.

Prayer:

Please forgive me Lord, when I allow my weaknesses to spoil my life. Help me in the areas in which I often fail.

For the next study read: John 21.

Study 7

Pentecost



Read: Acts chapter 2

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost changed the lives of the believers. It was awesome when He came. There was a violent wind, and fire above each of their heads. They spoke in other languages. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. The languages given by the Holy Spirit were instantaneously confirmed as actual languages by the people who knew those languages. (5-12).

At the funeral of a friend of mine, John Sarson, the story was told of how John, a bus driver, once used the gift of tongues that God had given him in an unusual way. When he walked into the bus station where he worked he found a heated argument was going on among the workers there. This was about to break out into a fight. He prayed and asked God what he should do. God said to him that he should speak in tongues. He did so in a loud voice. Immediately the situation calmed down, and the men disbanded and went to their work. Afterwards, someone came to John and said "I did not know that you could speak Gujarati."

If we think we have to be special to receive this gift, Peter later says, "The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off." (Acts 2:39). We have to really want the blessing of God. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled" (Matt 5:6). "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." (John 7:37). It means coming often to God in prayer.

The Holy Spirit can change and sanctify our tongues as He did with Peter. Outstanding leadership gifts became evident in Peter.

Peter's message includes an explanation of events (Acts 2:14-21), and a declaration of the good news of Jesus, His death, resurrection and exaltation (22– 36). It also included the need for repentance followed by baptism (36—40). A similar pattern and theme is used in Chapter 3. Acts 2:33 has been described as a key verse in the books of Acts.

The believers were united and shared the Apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers. (verse 42). These are the essential parts of church life. They were not cold daily duties, because signs and wonders were taking place through the Apostles (which are not recorded in detail

Peter took the lead in suggesting the appointment of an apostle to take the place of Judas who killed himself after betraying Jesus. They chose two names and then by casting lots they asked God to show who he wanted to be the new Apostle. This may have been by putting their names on a tablet in a container and shaking it till one came out. However, this is the Bible's last mention of drawing lots. As a result the number of disciples was then complete. God wants all his people to be ready to receive His blessing. Not only is prayer necessary but sometimes action is needed before that day of blessing can come.

Later when persecution increased, the followers of Jesus prayed strongly, using the Old Testament scripture as they prayed. (Acts 4:23-31). They prayed for boldness and for miracles and God heard—the place was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

Peter in Acts 10 went on the roof-top to pray while staying at Simon the tanner's house in Joppa, (Acts 10:9) and God spoke to him. Many years later the Apostle Paul when talking about prayer used the words, "with groans that words cannot express". (Romans 8:26).



Discussion

1. Matthew 26:36-45 Why did Peter fail to pray with Jesus?
2. Acts 1:13/14. What are the advantages of group prayer? What was the group praying for? How does having an objective help? Discuss.
3. Read: Acts 4:23-31. How would you describe this prayer? What does it include that can help us?
4. Read: Acts 10:9–20. Peter prayed on a flat roof top in the warm sun. God spoke to Peter. Has He ever spoken to you when praying? Discuss.
5. How does the Holy Spirit help us in prayer? Romans 8:26



Prayer:

Thank you Father that you answer prayer and that you have heard my prayer also.



For the next study read: Acts chapter 2

Study 5

Jesus talks to Peter

When Jesus rose from the dead, he said to the woman who met Him near the tomb, "Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, there they will see me" Matthew 28:10. A divine appointment with God had been made.



Read: John 21

Like a fish dealer on the shore of the Sea of Galilee Jesus called out "Friends, have you any fish?" In the dim early morning light the disciples did not at first recognise Him. Their reply was "no". After fishing all night they had caught nothing. So the supposed "fish dealer" said, "throw your nets on the right side of the ship". They did and immediately caught so many fish they were unable to pull in the net. John said, "It is the Lord". Peter took his cloak, jumped into the water and swam to the shore.

The catch of fish was God's provision for them and their families. It was also to become a method for catching men. Jesus had said "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men". (Mark 1:17). Efforts to win men for Christ by way of evangelism can be long and tiring. However if we persevere, sometimes God comes and speaks. If we obey, then we have success. He will teach how and when to act to get the best results.

Peter wanted to be first to meet Jesus so he swam to the shore. When he got there he found a fire of burning coals with fish cooking. We could ask, "Where did Jesus get the coal and the fish?"

The fire Jesus prepared would warm the disciples. They were wet with sea-spray and it was cold in the morning air. The breakfast that He provided would be welcome after a night on the lake. Jesus is thoughtful and caring about our needs. Jesus asked the disciples to bring their fish too. *Jesus always calls on us to make our contribution to what He is doing.*

Once warmed and fed Jesus said to Peter. "Simon, son of John, do you love (agape) me more than these?" Peter replied "Yes Lord, you know that I love (phileo) you". The Greek word that Jesus used for love was "Agape". The word Peter used was "Phileo". The first is a deep intense love. The second is the affection of friendship. Jesus asked the question a second time and Peter gave the same answer. Jesus told him each time "Feed my lambs". The third time Jesus asked the question to Peter he used the word "phileo". Jesus accepted a humbled Peter and the limited love that Peter

could offer. Peter had changed from the man who said, “I will go with you to prison and to death” and who then denied his Lord. Now he is restored.

Jesus instructed him to “take care of my sheep”. A pastor must love Jesus and be called by the Lord to take care of God’s people. In the chapters that follow in Acts we will see how Peter and the other apostles stayed in Jerusalem, in spite of persecution, and gave good Biblical teaching to the thousands of new believers. Finally Jesus gave some prophetic words to Peter in verse 18. Peter would be imprisoned and others would decide his fate. His death would glorify God. In other words, the unfaithful Peter would become the faithful Peter. “You are... You shall be”. In Revelation 2:10 it says, “be faithful to death and I will give you a crown of life”.

When Peter asked about John’s future, Jesus said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me”. In other words we must concentrate on following Jesus ourselves and not compare ourselves with others.



Discussion:

1. Who was the first person to recognise Jesus on shore?
2. The disciples worked all night and caught nothing. Discuss hopeless, tiring situations which are difficult to get free from. Can God speak? If so how can our obedience make a difference?
3. What do you notice about God’s provision? How many fish were there and what about the net? What was this to teach about Jesus’ words “I will make you fishers of men”.
4. How was Jesus’ care shown by making breakfast? What can we learn from this?
5. Why did Jesus ask “Do you love me more than these?”
6. How did Peter reply? What had changed in Peter?
7. What did the Lord’s commission tell Peter to do?
8. What prophetic word did Jesus give to Peter?
9. What can we learn from what Jesus said about John?
10. Have you ever experienced God’s provision of your needs? Have you known restoration after you failed Him?



Prayer:

“Lord, meet with me as you met with Peter and change me.”



For the next study read: Matthew 26: 36-45, Acts 1:13/14 & 4:23 –31 & 10: 9 –20, noting events concerning Peter.

Study 6

Prayer makes a difference



Read: Matthew 26:36-45, Acts 1:13/14, 4:23-31, 10: 9-20

When a new product is made and developed it can change our lives, especially in the area of communication. One such product is the mobile phone. Samuel Morse made the first working electric telegraph using an electromagnet in 1835. In 1946 a mobile telephone service (MTS) was introduced in the United States. Today, 900,000 handsets are sold every three days and mobile phones have changed the lives of many, even in rural villages across the world.



Prayer is communicating with God. It can be a quick request “Lord save me” Matthew 14:30 and it can be made at any place at any time to an all powerful God. However, it can be much deeper than that as we see when we look at Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Peter was invited with James and John to keep watch while Jesus prayed shortly before his arrest and crucifixion. (Matt 26:36-45). They fell asleep while Jesus agonised as He faced not only a cruel death, but the pain of carrying the punishment for our sins in his own body. (1 Peter 2:22-24, Isaiah 53:7-12). This was unbearable. He prayed three times till sweat, like drops of blood, came out of his body (Luke 22:44). Finally he was through. He was ready to face suffering and death. He was disappointed that His disciples did not stay awake and share his burden at the most important time in His life. As we mature in the Christian life, we can learn to pray like Jesus did, especially over important matters. It is a lonely path but sometimes it is the only way through. James Montgomery wrote:

*“Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, uttered or un-expressed,
The motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast”*
The apostle Paul said that the Holy Spirit helps us in prayer.
(Romans 8:26).

The disciples started praying in groups after the ascension of Jesus in Acts 1. The believers “all joined together constantly in prayer”. (Acts 1:14). This prayer meeting was repeated day after day and God answered. Later on,