

SIMON PETER, RESTORED DISCIPLE

When Pastor Graham arrived at church early in the morning, another car was already parked there. It was strange, because he was usually the first person there. He walked to the back of the building, where he found a new member, Gilbert, working on the church van.

“Hey, Brother Gilbert,” Graham said, “what’s going on?”

Gilbert looked up, tools in hand. “Pastor, I heard from some parents that the church van had broken down. If it doesn’t get fixed, the youth trip isn’t going to happen. Since I’m a mechanic, I thought I’d try to fix it.”

“I appreciate all the help you give, Gilbert. This really is an answer to prayer! You know, it isn’t the first time you’ve done something without being asked. We’d love to get you involved in a ministry here.”

Gilbert lit up. “That sounds wonderful, Pastor! I’ve been wanting to give back.” Gilbert paused for a moment, shifting uncomfortably. “Before I met Jesus, I wasn’t the man I am now. I’ve changed, and I thank Jesus every day for saving me. The man I was . . . if I could go back in time and change things, I would. The least I can do is to make myself useful.”

Pastor Graham put a hand on Gilbert’s shoulder. “God has already forgiven you. You don’t need to prove that you’ve changed or try to make up for your past. When you serve, I want you to know that you are free. You don’t need to feel guilty for your past anymore.”

1 When have you tried to make up for something that you did or said?

2 Is it easier for you to forgive or to accept forgiveness from others?

²⁷ And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?

²⁸ And they answered, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.

²⁹ And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

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³¹ And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: ³² But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

³³ And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.

³⁴ And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

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²⁵ And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not.

²⁶ One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? ²⁷ Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

²⁸ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

²⁹ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

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³¹ “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

³³ But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.”

³⁴ Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.”

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²⁵ Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, “You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?” He denied it, saying, “I am not.”

²⁶ One of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?”

²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

Do You Know Him?

Today's texts come from different Gospels, but they all reveal a developing relationship between Peter and Jesus. Before Peter was the great evangelist who persuaded thousands to be baptized into faith (Acts 2:14–41), before he spoke up to support the gospel ministry to Gentiles (Acts 15:7–11), Peter was a simple, Galilean fisherman—one whom Jesus chose as a disciple (Matt. 4:18–22).

Scene One (Mark 8)—Caesarea Philippi lies on the northwestern outskirts of Israel. While walking to a place named for an earthly king, Jesus asks what His disciples have seen. The crowds think that Jesus is a prophet; it would explain why He speaks for God and performs miracles. But even this high view of Jesus is not the whole truth. Jesus is looking for more when He asks, “Who do you say I am?” (v. 29). It is Peter who speaks first and gives the right response: Jesus is the Christ or Messiah (v. 30)—the rightful king bringing salvation. Peter really knows Jesus.

Scene Two (Luke 22)—The time is drawing near when Jesus will be arrested. He pulls Peter aside with heavy news. Satan, the enemy, is seeking to divide them (v. 31). Jesus has been praying for Simon Peter to have steadfast faith in a coming ordeal (v. 32). But Peter expresses his depth of resolve and willingness to die with his king. However, Jesus already knows this is not true. He knows that Peter will deny that he ever associated with a man called Jesus.

Scene Three (John 18)—The unthinkable has happened. Jesus has been betrayed, and while Peter was quick to defend him with a sword, now he's hanging around to see what happens. All of the sudden, he is recognized as the sword-wielding comrade of Jesus! It's Peter's moment to show the quality of his character. But fear catches him in the throat as he denies knowing Jesus; then again, and again.

1 What does Peter know about Jesus that others don't know (Mark 8)?

2 What does Jesus know about Peter (Luke 22)?

3 Why is Peter so afraid to admit that he knows Jesus (John 18)?

¹⁵ So when they had dined, Jesus saith unto Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

¹⁶ He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

¹⁷ He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

Do You Love Him?

Wouldn't you like to have seen Peter's face when he learns that his closest friend, the one he *knew* to be the Messiah, had risen? Imagine the recognition coming over him and the waves of conflicting emotions. In John's Gospel, his immediate response is to run (John 20:3–4). He races to the tomb to be the first to enter, where he sees the strips of cloth that had covered the face of his crucified king (John 20:6–7). Yet when the risen Jesus appears, He says nothing specific to Peter. What could possibly be said? But when Jesus breathes upon Peter and gives the Holy Spirit, do you imagine that Peter can meet His gaze (John 20:21–23)?

Scene 4 (John 21)—The reading picks up some time later; the exact date we don't know. Peter has returned to his fishing lifestyle, setting out with others in a boat upon the Sea of Galilee. And then the risen Jesus comes to them, again.

When Peter realizes it is Jesus, he leaps from the boat and swims

to the shore to reach his friend. Jesus is hungry and ready to share breakfast. As they eat, everyone is struggling to know what to say. They have returned to the beginning.

When Jesus is through eating He turns and addresses “Simon son of John,” suddenly sounding formal (John 21:15). It’s the moment that Peter has been dreading, when Jesus seems ready to bring up what he had done. But Jesus just says, “Do you love me?”

It feels like a strange test, but Peter knows the answer. Of course, he loves Jesus; and he reminds Jesus, “You know” (v. 15). But Jesus seems to deflect by saying, “Feed my lambs.” It’s like Jesus is saying, *Be that leader I knew you were. Be the one who looks after others.*

Then Jesus repeats the same question all over again! Maybe He wants a different response or some kind of assurance like, *I will try harder.* But Peter gives the same answer, “You know that I love you” (v. 16). When Jesus says “Take care of my sheep,” Peter has to be wondering where this conversation is going (v. 16).

As Jesus repeats His question a third time, Peter understands. Just as Jesus—who knows all things—was wounded by three denials, Peter needs to hear Jesus repeat the lesson three times. It’s true: Jesus already *knows* Peter’s heart. It’s true: Peter put his own safety ahead of loyalty to his king. But he cannot repeat the pattern.

Once Jesus is gone, and Peter is in a position of leadership, he’ll be tempted time and again to hide. Jesus is saying to Peter, *You are that rock and pillar I knew you to be—a shepherd who looks after others.* Jesus, the Great Shepherd, is about to leave Peter in charge of the sheep. And because He knows that Peter loves Him, He also knows that Peter will be the selfless leader others desperately need.

1 Do you love Jesus? And how does it feel to be asked?

2 If you love Jesus, how do you show it?

3 What does the witness of Peter teach us about loving Jesus?

Grace to Restore

No one is beyond God's redemption. Over and over, God seems to delight in bringing back those who have lost their way. But like Peter, perhaps we worry that the past determines how Jesus includes us. Perhaps, we shudder to remember that God knows us completely.

Reading about Peter reminds me of the testimony of the great hymn writer, minister, and abolitionist, John Newton. Before Newton would write some of the most famous hymns of all time, he was a captain of a ship transporting African slaves. In his youth he was hard to manage, known for crude behavior, and his Christian conversion at sea did not immediately change everything about him. For instance, it is well-known that he made three additional trips across the Atlantic as a slave-ship captain *after* 1748 (the year of his Christian conversion). When he would later write the words about a "wretch" who had been lost, he knew them better than anyone.

The amazing grace that Jesus shows is not to count our failures as disqualifying. Notice that Peter did not hide from Jesus or offer excuses. Jesus didn't need to hear Peter express remorse, but He wanted Peter to look to his future role as a leader. Jesus offers the grace that a friend would offer. He doesn't ask Peter to try harder, bury his face in shame, or go to the back of the line. Jesus just wants him to love as he had been loved.

I like to think that Peter's favorite verse of "Amazing Grace" (by John Newton) might be this:

The Lord hath promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

1 What is your testimony of God's amazing grace?

2 What self-doubt or unhelpful narratives might hold us back from receiving the grace of Jesus?

3 What does God want in response to the grace you have been shown?

Never Too Far Gone

Jesus' reinstatement of Peter is an incredible encouragement to us. No matter how far we may have strayed from God, through repentance we can still be used for His kingdom. What parts of your story—past or present—make you feel unworthy to be used by God? Take the opportunity to review the words of Amazing Grace as you offer this prayer in the week ahead.

*Jesus, even though I _____,
I believe You can use me. I believe you have good in store for me.*

Key Text

He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. —John 21:17 KJV

The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” —John 21:17 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of July 13 through July 18

- Mon.** Exodus 22:1–6—God Calls for Restitution.
- Tue.** Isaiah 58:3–7—Let the Oppressed Go Free.
- Wed.** Luke 6:20–26—Blessings and Woes.
- Thu.** Hebrews 13:1–6—Love, Hospitality, and Contentment.
- Fri.** 1 John 3:14–18—Put Love Into Action.
- Sat.** Psalm 37:1–5, 18–22—Commit Your Way to God.

Next Week: Luke 19:1–10

We will continue to talk about redemption, but this time through the story of Zacchaeus. What do you predict might be similar or different about Zacchaeus's testimony?