

## Peter: Bold Gospel Preacher

**Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd.** (Acts 2:14)

**Scripture:** Acts 2:14–21

**Song:** “To the Work”

The rocks my daughter and I had hopped on to cross a stream just a few hours before were now covered in deeper water, making it dangerous for us to return to our campsite. But we had no choice, as there was no other way back. My daughter crossed first, as she was younger. Once she crossed, she encouraged me. She had to, because I feared water and did not know how to swim. So, I summoned my courage and took a leap.

Peter and the other apostles also needed courage. God’s Spirit had come in a new and fresh way on the Day of Pentecost. Strange signs appeared, among them people speaking in non-native languages that were understood by the various cultures represented at this special occasion. Many ideas about “this Jesus person” circulated, so Peter and the others needed to explain what Jesus had taught about this Comforter who had now descended.

Life is tough. Being a light for Jesus and doing His work requires boldness and courage—traits only Jesus can give. Yet, our comfort comes in another promise from Jesus: He will never leave or forsake us. So go ahead and cross whatever stream intimidates you. God will provide the needed courage to do His work.

**Father**, please give me the boldness to do Your work. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

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July 6–12. **Martin Wiles** is an author, freelance editor, and managing editor. He is the husband of one, the father of two, and the Pop of seven.

## I Sought the Lord

**I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.** (Psalm 34:4)

**Scripture:** Psalm 34:1–9

**Song:** “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

My son and I took an overnight camping trip on the Appalachian Trail in the Georgia mountains. We planned to sleep in an AT shelter—a three-sided crude structure. I carefully hung our food far from the shelter, but the two young men who camped near us did not. When I heard yelling and pots banging during the night, I knew bears had infiltrated their campsite. I lay in fear, praying as I waited to hear the low huffing as the bears rambled to our shelter. Fortunately, they never came.

David fled from a jealous and crazed King Saul, who was convinced David wanted the throne. David had served Saul faithfully, yet unfounded fear drove him to pursue David—and logical fear led David to flee. David sought refuge with Abimelech, thinking a Philistine king would give him refuge. Although David fled, he confidently gave his fears to God.

In perilous times, we must all do as David did: give our fears to God. In 2 Timothy 1:7, we are reminded that God has not given His people a spirit of timidity but of “power, love and self-discipline.” No enemy—real or imagined, tangible or intangible—looms greater than the God we serve. Give your fears to God, seek Him, and let Him propel you to be His witness.

**Father,** I give my fears to You, knowing You will give me victory over them. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

## The Lord Delivers

**The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.** (Psalm 34:18)

**Scripture:** Psalm 34:10–22

**Song:** “It Is Well with My Soul”

My grandparents were like parents to me. In many ways, I felt closer to them than I did to my parents. I was the first grandchild on my father’s side, so I had my grandparents all to myself for four years. My grandmother was my first babysitter; the one with whom I delivered Avon.<sup>TM</sup> During middle school, I spent summers working on the ice cream truck with my grandfather. Many years later, my heart broke when he pointed to the sky and said he was going home. Several years after that, my heart broke again when my grandmother moved to her eternal home.

The psalmist doesn’t detail what led to his brokenness. He is more interested in God’s role during the periods of difficulty. He assures his troubled readers that God will supply their needs because His eyes are always upon them. He will deliver them from trouble and rescue them from their enemies.

As present-day believers, we too can take comfort from the psalmist’s words. We live in a broken world, and this brokenness often infiltrates our lives—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Knowing Christ doesn’t make us immune to trials and tribulations. Our advantage, however, is that we have God’s Spirit to comfort us and give us wisdom for moving forward. In your times of brokenness, let God’s nearness give you peace.

**Father,** thank You for being near in my times of brokenness. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

## Peter Misunderstands

**[Jesus] spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.** (Mark 8:32)

**Scripture:** Mark 8:27–33

**Song:** “We’ll Understand It Better By and By”

I’d read the book of Job numerous times but still didn’t understand the reasons for what happened to a young family in the church I pastored. The wife struggled with addictions, and the husband tried to deal with it. One night, the call came. As the wife was driving back from her parents with their young baby, she ran off the road and wrecked, and the child died. Sadly, alcohol was involved. Sitting beside the stunned husband, I had no words to offer. How could my imperfect understanding comfort him?

When Jesus asked His disciples who people said He was, Peter was the only one who answered correctly: He was the Messiah. But when Jesus told the disciples about how He would die, Peter reprimanded Him. Jesus’ predicted end didn’t match Peter’s understanding of what the Messiah came to do. No white horse. No reign over their foreign oppressors.

Part of our faith walk as believers entails imperfect understanding. God’s revelation has always been progressive, and He has never answered every question we pose. If we knew and understood it all, we wouldn’t need faith. God stretches our faith by withholding some answers from us. But as the song proclaims, we hope to understand it better, by and by. Until then, we trust that God will do the right thing as we do His work.

**Father,** although I possess imperfect understanding, I trust You as the perfect provider. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

## God Will Strengthen and Help

**“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.”** (Isaiah 41:10)

**Scripture:** Isaiah 41:8–13

**Song:** “Our God Is an Awesome God”

Because I almost drowned as a young boy, I possess a healthy fear of water. My brother, daughter, son, and I once backpacked in a confusing area and came to a river we weren't expecting. We had to cross it or return the way we came. The fact that the weather was quite chilly didn't help. My brother and daughter forded it first. Since the water was above my son's head, I hefted him on my back, swallowed my fear, and made my way across. Thankfully, we all arrived safely.

Israel had a history with God—one of deliverance and one in which He often told them not to fear, but they did anyway. God had delivered them from 400 years of slavery, provided for them through 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, and brought them into the promised land by defeating their enemies there. Over and over, God demonstrates why His people do not need to fear.

Good fears lead us to flee from danger. But bad fears paralyze us, keeping us from moving forward with God's plan, harming us emotionally, and even damaging us physically. “Perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18), and we experience that perfect love through walking with Christ, drawing our strength and help from God.

**Father**, give me strength and deliver me from those fears that keep me from being all You want. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

## Peter Denies Jesus

**But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.** (Mark 14:61)

**Scripture:** Mark 14:55–72

**Song:** “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

Writers often face the pressure of deadlines. One contract at a time and spread apart is ideal, but the pressure rises when they arrive in bunches. My wife and I call this “feast or famine.” Although I’ve never been late with an assignment, I can feel the pressure as I try to finish multiple projects with varying formats and themes. Pacing myself, reassuring myself that I have plenty of time, and praying keep me from crumbling under pressure.

Jesus faced the pressure of the cross in His future and the pressure of His identity in the present. Many falsely testified against Him. The high priest and other officials accused Jesus of blasphemy. Some spit on Him. Others struck Him. But Jesus did not crumble. Peter, however, did. He crumbled with denial when questioned about whether he belonged to the Messiah’s band of followers.

Persecution has hounded believers throughout Christian history and still does in some countries. But other pressures can keep us from God’s work. Work, family, relationships, hobbies, sports—the list is endless. The pressure to perform in some way proves relentless. Our priority must be to do God’s work without crumbling under other pressures or the persecution—physical or otherwise—that might accompany our efforts. God is faithful. Trust Him as you do His work.

**Father,** give me the strength to do Your work without crumbling under life’s pressures. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

## Jesus Restores Peter

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.” (John 21:16)

**Scripture:** John 21:15–19

**Song:** “Send the Light”

*What are you doing?* The question stuck in my mind like an old wagon in a deep rut. I was writing and posting God’s love message in numerous places daily. I taught one hundred middle schoolers five days a week and often integrated biblical teachings into my lessons. Yet, I felt God leading me to do more. God’s prompting brought me to a prison mentoring ministry where (through my pen) I pray with those who are incarcerated, encourage them, and advise them on enriching their spiritual journey with Christ.

After he betrayed Christ, Peter doubtlessly felt terrible. But Jesus recommissioned him to feed the flock of believers. A restored Peter would accept the challenge, reverse his failure, and do more—even preaching on the Day of Pentecost, when thousands of people from various countries would believe in the same Jesus he did.

Christ gives believers the privilege and responsibility to feed spiritual truth to others. We share the love of Christ with those who don’t know Him, and we help those who do to grow spiritually. The ways we do this are as varied as we are. God gives us the Spirit to guide us as we carry out these endeavors, fulfilling Jesus’ promise that He will never leave or forsake us. Look for ways that you can help God tend to His flock.

**Father,** I am Your willing servant. Use me to feed and care for other believers. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.