

Renewal overview 10 -- ‘From Fisherman to Fisher of Men’ John 21:1 - 19

The goal of every Christian disciple is to be transformed into Christ’s likeness. Below are four snapshots from the life of Peter, the disciple that the gospel writers make most known to us. Can you find yourself in Peter’s journey of Christian transformation?

Snapshot # 1 ‘Who is the master here?’ -- Luke 5:1 – 11. At the beginning of their relationship, Jesus asked Peter to row his boat into deeper waters and let down his nets for a catch. Peter informed his new master that he had already been fishing all night but had caught nothing. However he added (apparently with some sarcasm in his voice), *“But Master, if you say so, I’ll let down the nets.”* Peter seemed to wonder how this carpenter turned rabbi could possibly know more about fishing than he did. But Peter was about to discover that the Son of God who created the seas and everything in them, also knew something about catching fish. Suddenly Peter nets were stretched to breaking point with fish and his boat was sinking under their weight. Peter’s pride quickly turned to humiliation as he said, *“Go away from me. Lord, I am a sinful man!”* But Peter’s faithful teacher wasn’t about to abandon his disciple. Peter began his journey with Jesus as a fisherman, but Jesus was determined to make his disciple a fisher of men, and a shepherd over his flock.

Snapshot # 2 ‘Peter takes the next step’ -- Matthew 14:22 – 31. Sometime later, Peter and some of the other disciples were again in a boat, straining to row against the wind (a situation highly symbolic of Peter’s faith journey). As they peered into the night they were terrified to see what appeared to be a ghost walking toward them on the water! But Jesus called to them, *‘Don’t be afraid. It is I’.* Peter wanted proof that it was the Lord; so he asked if he could join Jesus out on the water. Jesus granted Peter permission, but when he felt the waves trying to pull him under, Peter panicked and cried out, *‘Lord save me!’* That night Peter learned that Jesus is Lord, not only over the land and the sea, but even over all the impossible situations we face.

Snapshot # 3 ‘Even if all forsake you, I will not’ -- Matthew 26:31 - 35. Throughout their years of following him, Jesus continually warned his disciples that he would eventually be arrested and crucified. But Peter simply wouldn’t hear of it (God’s ways are not our ways). On the night before his crucifixion Jesus again warned his disciples that they were about to desert him prior to his arrest. To this Peter replied, *“Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”* But Peter still had some self-discovering to do. As Peter’s words echoed through the night they later collided with his swearing again and again and again that he didn’t even know Jesus. Then the rooster crowed. One of the most heartbreaking moments in Scripture is when, immediately following Peter’s third denial, Jesus turned and looked directly into the face of his frail disciple. This is the last time that Peter would see his best friend before Christ was crucified. On that dark night Peter wept bitter tears. But Jesus was still not finished with Peter.

Snapshot # 4 “Do you really love me?” John 21:1 – 19

John’s final recorded scene between Peter and Jesus begins with Peter sitting in a fishing boat that is sinking under the weight of a miraculous catch, yet again. Peter looked at the distant figure standing on the shore who had just told him where to let down his nets. Peter now knew who it was. Leaving everything behind, he jumped into the water and swam to shore to meet his resurrected Lord. After breakfast the disciple and his master walked along the shore. As they talked Jesus allowed Peter to replace his three denials with three declarations of his undying love and loyalty to Jesus. Jesus then informed Peter about the kind of death by which he would glorify God. Church tradition tells us that Peter was eventually crucified upside down because he refused to quit spreading the good news about his friend and saviour, Jesus. Peter’s last written challenge to his fellow followers reads, *“Keep growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ...”* (2 Peter 3:18)

As Christ’s disciple, what’s your next step on the journey to becoming like Christ?

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1. Read John 21:1 – 6. Do you find anything familiar about the events that surround Jesus' third appearance to Peter and the other disciples?
2. Why did John recognise Jesus after the miraculous catch? (21:7)
3. Why was Peter, of all the other disciples, willing to leave everything behind and swim to shore? (21:7 – 8)
4. Does Jesus' breakfast of bread and fish that he prepared for his disciples remind you of any previous events in John's gospel? (John 21:9 – 13 and 6:1 - 15). What is the connection between these events?
5. Why do you think Jesus kept appearing to small groups of disciples during his final 40 days on earth? (21:14)
6. Why did Jesus keep asking Peter (3 times), 'Do you love me?' 21:15 – 17
7. What did Jesus mean by his statement to Peter, '*When you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go*'? (21:18 – 19)
8. How does this final scene between our Lord Jesus and his disciple Peter speak to you personally?