

How Peter Became a Fisher of Men

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How did Peter, an “unschooled, ordinary man” with well-documented flaws, have an extraordinary personal ministry? In the epic story of Peter’s life, Jesus prepared him in three main ways. In these same ways, each one of us becomes a fisher of men, too.



By Patrick Morley
MIM Founder & Executive Chairman
Winter Park, Florida

What is a disciple? *Disciple* comes from the Greek word *mathetes*, which translates as “pupil” or “learner.” When used in conjunction with Jesus, it came to mean an adherent to the person and teachings of Jesus—a follower.

Used as a verb, it is the process by which God *calls* us to salvation, *equips* us to live the Christian life, and *sends* us to live with Jesus

and for His glory. Inherent to this, we are sent to help others become disciples, too.

Like you and me, Peter was also [called, equipped, and sent](#) by Jesus. Let's look at how he became a fisher of men—and how each one of us becomes a fisher of men, too.

CALLING Ordinary Men into an Extraordinary Relationship

Peter and his brother Andrew owned a small fishing business. Not long after Jesus began His public ministry, He said to them, “Come, follow me... and I will make you fishers of men” ([Mark 1:17](#)).

Jesus simply invited them to start a relationship. As Peter heard those staggering words, his heart flooded with the prospect of finding a higher purpose for his life. He took a sabbatical and left everything to tour with Jesus.

He witnessed firsthand the early miracles of Jesus. Peter saw Jesus cast out a demon, heal his mother-in-law of a high fever, and preach throughout Judea. When they returned to Peter and Andrew's hometown, Capernaum, Peter decided he needed to give some attention to his fishing business.

Not long after that, Jesus asked Peter for a small favor. Jesus was trying to speak to some people who had crowded around Him to hear the word of God. He saw two boats pulled up onshore by Peter and some other fishermen who were washing their nets. Jesus got into the boat that belonged to Peter and asked him to push a little offshore so He could teach the crowd.

When Jesus finished speaking, He told Peter to put out into deep water and let down his nets for a catch. That must have been an awkward moment: a carpenter telling a fisherman how to catch fish. Plus, every fisherman on the Sea of Galilee knew you catch fish at night, not during the day!

By this time, though, Peter had enough experience with Jesus to trust Him. So he said, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets” ([Luke 5:5](#)).

They took out the boat, let down the nets, and caught so many fish that their nets started to break. Then they signaled for the other boat to come help, and they filled both boats with so many fish that they started to sink!

When Peter saw what Jesus had done for him, he was unexpectedly overcome by emotion. Peter fell at His knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” (verse 8). He was, in a word, awestruck.

Once Peter called Jesus “Lord” and confessed his sinfulness, Jesus said, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men” (verse 10).

And so began the illustrious career of the man we associate with passion, boldness, courage, curiosity, and yes, impulsiveness and flaws.

How God Calls Men Today

I have a pretty good idea of what Peter went through, and I’ll bet you do, too. That’s because not much has changed in the area of calling men to discipleship in two thousand years.

Like Peter, I loved my work but wondered if there was any larger purpose to life. Was life just a random, senseless, pointless, wasted experience? At the time, it sure seemed like a futile and meaningless exercise. We’re here, and then we’re gone. Life is hard, and then we die. So what?

But then God began to awaken within me a yearning to know—to *really* know—Him.

When I first started thinking seriously about God, I had pictured Him high but not *that* high, because at the same time I thought I was pretty high, too. As I started to get to know the Lord, however, I realized He is so much higher and holier than I ever thought or imagined.

Then one day I felt I didn’t even deserve to be in His presence. The glow of His glory was like a halogen floodlight that exposed what a sinful creature I

am compared to His holiness. I felt shame and guilt to even be in the presence of something so heavy, so holy. Awestruck, I hit the deck. Like Peter, I said in essence, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”

But that awestruck moment of humility, faith, and repentance is precisely what Jesus is looking for—the starting point of how God makes men.

His challenge to us, like it was to Peter, is to follow Jesus—to give Him our lives and then be the witnesses who tell others how they can follow Him, too.

Peter answered the Lord’s call. But before Christ could send Peter out to be a fisher of men, He first had to equip him for the task.

EQUIPPING Ordinary Men for Extraordinary Tasks Through Authentic Relationships

Jesus had a surprisingly simple plan to make disciples. We find it in [Mark 3:14-15](#): “He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.”

Jesus called Peter and the rest of the twelve disciples to be “*with him.*” In other words, He called them into a relationship—a small group, a close community, where they would become like brothers.

They would eventually spend three-plus years living, eating, working, playing, praying, and retreating together. They observed the life and teachings of Jesus. They saw His miracles. They watched how people responded and how lives changed. They were touched by His tenderness, kindness, and love. They marveled at His wisdom, restraint, mercy, and forgiveness. They were enraptured by the parables of the kingdom and by His description of His own death and resurrection. They practiced what they learned by going out in pairs, and then reported back what had happened.

Jesus brought ordinary men together in authentic relationships where He equipped them to accomplish extraordinary tasks. That was, and is, the

elegant simplicity of God's plan to make men who will be qualified to reach other men.

Jesus made it safe for His disciples to express their honest doubts and reservations and to ask questions. Peter was the curious one who often asked the questions that were no doubt on the minds of all the disciples:

- “Explain the parable to us” ([Matthew 15:15](#)).
- “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother?” ([Matthew 18:21](#)).
- “We left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” ([Matthew 19:27](#)).
- “Tell us, when will these things happen?” ([Mark 13:4](#)).
- “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?” ([Luke 12:41](#)).
- “Lord, where are you going?” ([John 13:36](#)).
- “Lord, why can't I follow you?” ([John 13:37](#)).
- “What about him?” ([John 21:21](#), referring to the fate of John).

Imagine how much we wouldn't know if Peter hadn't asked!

One day Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do you say I am?” In what is known as the Caesarea Philippi Confession (after the location where it was made), again it was Peter who responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied:

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ([Matthew 16:15-18](#))

Peter's association *with him* was having the desired effect. Peter was changing. He was being transformed by the renewing of his mind (see [Romans 12:2](#)). He was growing in spiritual maturity (see [Ephesians 4:11-13](#)). He was being equipped.

A Place for Flawed Men

Yet Peter also made many mistakes. A few moments later, Jesus began to predict His death. “I’m going to go up to Jerusalem,” He said. “I’m going to suffer. I’m going to be killed. But I’m going to rise from the dead” (see [Matthew 16:21](#)).

Peter, who only moments before had declared his belief in the deity of Jesus with such humility and conviction, now took Jesus aside and scolded Him for saying such a thing. “‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’” (verse 22).

Don’t you love it? Haven’t we all been there, telling God what’s best for Him? If God didn’t use flawed men, He wouldn’t use any men at all.

Even though Peter was well on his way to becoming the man God wanted him to be, we can still see a lot of things that were not quite right in him. “Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men’” (verse 23).

There were, of course, other stumbles—like cutting off the right ear of the high priest’s servant, denying three times that he even knew Jesus, and telling Jesus, “You will never wash my feet!” (see [John 18:10](#), [17](#), [25-27](#); [13:8](#)).

Like Peter, you and I are going to stumble. To stumble is inevitable; it’s part of the process. Jesus isn’t put off by our spiritual immaturity. Quite the opposite. He expects it. Like a loving parent, even though He knew we would be sinners, He never stopped wanting to have us as His children. He is committed to helping us grow up into mature disciples by being *with him*.

SENDING Ordinary Men to Live Out Extraordinary Ministry

As it was in the days of Peter, God is still equipping men the same way He always has: simply bringing people together around Jesus and changing the way they think and what they do. A main purpose for equipping us is to send us to reach others who will, in turn, [reach still others](#). Here’s how Paul said it to Timothy: “Teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others” ([2 Timothy 2:2](#)).

No one grasped this simple plan of Jesus better than Peter. [Mark 3:14](#) tells us that Jesus picked twelve men not only to be “with him” but also to “send them” to make disciples.

The words *Peter* and *bold* go together in many people’s minds. He was a gigantic figure in the early church, and his extraordinary ministry is recorded in the book of Acts. For example, after the Resurrection, Peter preached to a huge crowd of people. After his first sermon, *three thousand* people responded and became followers of Jesus (see [Acts 2:41](#)).

When Peter was traveling the country, he found a paralyzed man who had been bedridden for eight years. Peter said, “Aeneas... Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat” ([Acts 9:34](#)). Aeneas immediately got up, and as a result, *many people who lived in that area turned to the Lord*.

A woman named Tabitha was a disciple known for doing good and helping poor people, but she died. Her friends asked for Peter. When he arrived, he “sent them all out of the room; then got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, ‘Tabitha, get up’” ([Acts 9:40](#)). She opened her eyes and got up. *The story went viral, and many people believed in the Lord*.

These are merely a handful of the astonishing things Peter did. Yet before Jesus invited him to be part of His small group, Peter was an unknown man leading a small life.

So how do we account for his success in making disciples?

The Secret to Becoming a Fisher of Men

Let’s look at more of the story. Once Peter started achieving success teaching and preaching about Jesus, the religious establishment had Peter and John seized and jailed. But that was like throwing gasoline on a burning fire. The number of men who believed exploded to five thousand (see [Acts 4:4](#)).

The next day Peter and John were questioned, but the Holy Spirit gave Peter powerful words to boldly proclaim the good news.

Here's what happened next: "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been *with Jesus*" ([Acts 4:13](#), emphasis added).

Now we know how Peter, an unschooled, ordinary man, had such an extraordinary personal ministry! He had been "with Jesus."

That was the center of God's training strategy from the start. And that's how you can have an extraordinary personal ministry, too.

Simply gather around the person of Christ, preferably in the company of a few like-minded men, and watch Him change the way you think and what you do. Then watch Him send you, and go.

THE BIG IDEA: *At the center of any discipleship strategy should be one thing: being with Jesus.*

For Reflection:

1. Can someone be a true disciple if he doesn't help others to become disciples, too?
2. Are you making time to be with Jesus?

This article has been adapted from Chapter 9 of [How God Makes Men](#) by Patrick Morley (Multnomah, 2013).

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