Simon Peter, the Restored Disciple

Mark 8:27-29; Luke 22:31-34; John 18:26-27; 21:15-17
SS Lesson for 07/12/2026

Devotional Scriptures: Ps 139:23-24

OUTLINE

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Peter was a fisherman from Bethsaida, a village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee (John 1:44). Here, Peter worked with his brother Andrew (Mark 1:16). While fishing on the Sea of Galilee, Peter and his brother are called by Jesus to follow him and "fish for people" (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11; John 1:35-42). We also know that Peter was married (Mark 1:30; 1 Corinthians 9:5). At some point, Peter, his wife, and at least one other family member moved to Capernaum (Matthew 8:5-14), a town approximately five miles southwest of Bethsaida. The New Testament notes three names for Peter. His Hebrew name is Simon or the variant Simeon (Mark 1:16; Acts 15:14). Later, Jesus calls him Peter, a designation based on an ancient Greek word meaning "rock" or "stone" (Matthew 16:18; Mark 3:16); this is his most frequently occurring name in the New Testament, found over 160 times. The third name is Cephas, an Aramaic word for "stone" (John 1:42; 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; etc.).

Key Verse: John 21:17

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Peter Identified the Messiah (Mark 8:27-29)

27 Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?"
28 So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets."
29 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."

Other people's identification of Jesus (27-28)

Other's understanding thinks the things of God are foolishness (1 Cor 2:14)

14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Other's understanding seeks answers through human ideas (Acts 17:16-21)

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. 18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. 19 Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." 21(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

Other's understanding uses human wisdom, which God frustrates and destroys (1 Cor 1:16-21)

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel-not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. 18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

Other's understanding is being veiled by Satan (2 Cor 4:3-4)

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Peter's responsive identification of Jesus (29)

Jesus is identified to those who do not know Him (Acts 17:22-24)

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. 24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.

Jesus is identified through His creations (Rom 1:20-23)

20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Jesus is identified because all things came from and through Him (1 Cor 8:5-6)

5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), 6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

Jesus is identified through His Divinity (Acts 17:29-30)

29 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by man's design and skill. 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

Peter's Failed Intentions (Luke 22:31-34)

31 And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.
32 But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."
33 But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."
34 Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."

Satan's request to attack Peter (31)

Satan is always prowling trying to devour Saints (1 Peter 5:8)

> 8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Satan wants others to follow him and the ways of the world (Eph 2:1-2)

> 1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

Satan traps and holds captive those who oppose Jesus (2 Tim 2:26)

> 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Jesus' prayer for Peter (32)

Jesus prayed for His disciples specifically (John 17:9)

> 9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

Jesus prayed that His disciples be protected from Satan (John 17:15-16)

> 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

Jesus prayed and therefore no one or nothing can separate us from His love (Rom 8:34-36)

> 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-more than that, who was raised to life-is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Jesus is able to completely protect and intercede for His people (Heb 7:25)

> 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Jesus intercedes and comes to the defense for the saint who sins (1 John 2:1)

> 2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Peter's over-zealous self-confidence (33-34)

God doesn't want man to be able to boast of his own strength (Judg 7:2-7)

> 2 The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order
> that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, 3 announce now to the people,
> 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men
> left, while ten thousand remained. 4 But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take
> them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go;
> but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." 5 So Gideon took the men down to the water.
> There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who
> kneel down to drink." 6 Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down
> on their knees to drink. 7 The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save
> you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place."

Sometimes confidence and selfish desires brings results that are not expected (Matt 20:21-23)

> 21 "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your
> right and the other at your left in your kingdom." 22 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to
> them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. 23 Jesus said to them, "You
> will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to
> those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

Over zealous self-confidence causes improper conclusions (Ps 30:6)

> 6 When I felt secure, I said, "I will never be shaken."

Over zealous self-confidence denies who really is in charge of the future - God (Luke 12:17-20)

> 17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 18 "Then he said, 'This is
> what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my
> goods. 19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy;
> eat, drink and be merry." ' 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded
> from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

Over zealous self-confidence sometimes tries to hide faults (Prov 30:12)

> 12 those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth;

Peter's Denial of Jesus (John 18:26-27)

26 One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?"
27 Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.

Accusation of Peter (26)

Accusation of failure (Mark 14:30)

> 30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today — yes, tonight — before the rooster crows twice you
> yourself will disown me three times."

Accusation of not standing firm (1 Cor 10:12)

> 12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

Accusation of yielding to temptation (Matt 26:40-41)

> 40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for
> one hour?" he asked Peter. 41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is
> willing, but the body is weak."

Peter's denial and conviction (27)

Conviction of denial should make one ashamed (Ezek 16:63)

> 63 Then, when I make atonement for you for all you have done, you will remember and be ashamed and never again open your mouth because of your humiliation, declares the Sovereign Lord.'"

Conviction of denial should make one repent (Rev 2:5)

> 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

Conviction of denial may lead to what God intended (2 Cor 7:8-9)

> 8 Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it — I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while, 9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.

Conviction that teaches to be careful of standing firm in our own power (1 Cor 10:12-13)

> 12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Peter's Restoration Involving Love (John 21:15-17)

15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs."
16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."
17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep.

Love so that we can nurture others (15)

Nurturing the weak (1 Kings 19:5-8)

> 5 Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." 6 He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. 7 The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." 8 So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

Nurturing the needy (2 Kings 4:2-6)

> 2 Elisha replied to her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?" "Your servant has nothing there at all," she said, "except a little oil." 3 Elisha said, "Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. 4 Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side." 5 She left him and afterward shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. 6 When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one." But he replied, "There is not a jar left." Then the oil stopped flowing.

Nurturing through others (2 Cor 8:14)

> 14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality,

Nurturing by God's supplying directly (2 Cor 9:10)

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

Nurturing through God's glorious riches (Phil 4:19)

19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Love so that we can lead others (16)

Leadership that leads to justification (Gal 3:24)

24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

Leadership that leads to the right way (Mark 10:32)

32 They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.

Leadership that leads to the Father God (John 14:6)

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Leadership that leads to a cleared way (1 Thess 3:11)

11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.

Love so that we pass knowledge on to others (17)

A knowledge of God that comes from Christians being a shining light (2 Cor 4:6)

6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Knowledge that comes from the anointing of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20)

20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.

A knowledge that gives us an understanding that God is the "true" God (1 John 5:20)

20 We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true — even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

Knowledge that is eternal life (John 17:3)

3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Jesus and Peter: Love's Obligation (21:15-23)

It is not enough merely to evangelize men. Discipleship begins with salvation, but it blossoms into a continuing process of growth and service. Our Lord informed His disciples through Peter that we must not only seek men's souls, but we must shepherd them also. And so we move from the well-known occupation of the fisherman, to that of the shepherd.

Most commentators seem to view verses 15-23 as a kind of public restoration of Peter to leadership by our Lord. That, to me, does not seem to be the case. I am not certain that Peter ever really ceased to be a leader among men. It was he who suggested this fishing expedition and the others gladly followed. Neither do I believe that Jesus' three-fold question was put to Peter before the eyes and ears of the other six. Notice verse

20: “Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His breast at the supper …” You see, all must agree that at some point in this conversation Jesus and Peter left the others. I would suggest that it was at the outset. There is nothing in verse 15 which implies the place of the conversation, only the time. The reason that John alone records this event may be that he followed behind closely enough to overhear the conversation.

The correspondence between the three-fold question of the Lord and the three-fold denial of Peter is difficult not to see. Jesus began by asking Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” (verse 15).

Peter had boasted of his love for the Lord before his denial, “Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away” (Matthew 26:33). Peter had then claimed that his love for the Lord surpassed that of any other. It is at this point that Jesus pressed Peter for a response.

Peter affirmed his love for the Lord Jesus, but with two notable exceptions. First, he did not make any comparisons between his love and that of the others. Second, he did not dare to speak of his love with as lofty a term as that employed by the Savior. He does love the Lord. As God knows his heart, there is great affection there. But his brash self-confidence has been eroded away by his denials.

Accepting this answer on face value, the Lord commissions Peter with the second duty of a disciple—that of tending the flock: “Tend My lambs” (verse 15).

Now, a second time, Jesus poses the question to Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” (verse 16).

The comparison of Peter’s love to that of the others is no longer involved. Only the intensity of Peter’s love is queried. Peter’s answer was the same: “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You” (verse 16).

With only slight variation, Jesus responded, “Shepherd My sheep” (verse 16).

It was the third question which grieved Peter deeply: “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” (verse 17).

There are two things about this question which would have grieved Peter. First of all, it was asked for the third time. The correspondence between these three questions and his three-fold denial is unmistakable. The question is asked specifically in the light of Peter’s denial of his Lord. The second cause of grief would be in the change of words employed. Jesus had previously used the word agape (or more precisely, the verb agapao) in the first two questions. Peter had answered using the less intense term phileo. In the third question, Jesus dropped the stronger term He had previously employed and adopted the weaker term with which Peter had twice responded. The outcome of this would seem to be that Jesus had progressively lowered the quality of love concerning which he is questioning Peter. The force of this might be paraphrased in this way:

Question 1: Peter, do you deeply love Me, even above all the others?

Question 2: Peter, do you deeply love Me?

Question 3: Peter, do you at least have a genuine affection for Me?

The scholars have greatly differed over the implications of the change of the Greek terms for love. But let me say this to those of you who are students of the Greek language and still remain single. If you were to become very interested in a particular young woman, you would have intense interest and concern over what Greek term she would use to describe her affection for you. A ‘phileo’ love for you would not be nearly as meaningful in your mind, as an ‘agape’ love would be.

Peter again must appeal to our Lord’s omniscience. “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love (phileo) You” (verse 17).

With this, Peter’s commission is once more repeated: “Tend My sheep” (verse 17).

One might be inclined to consider our Lord’s questioning a bit severe in the light of Peter’s previous repentance and restoration. I believe that there are several purposes served in this interchange. First Peter is reminded of the folly of self-confidence. Second, our Lord’s purpose was not to work up feelings of guilt, but of humility. No one can shepherd the flock rightly without humility. Third, Peter is reminded that the measure of one’s love for Christ is not measured by the confessions of their lips, but by the conduct of their lives. Peter’s love will be evidenced by His care of God’s sheep. Finally, this three-fold question is also a three-fold commission, assuring Peter that in spite of His fall, God has a significant work for him to do.

Finally, the three-fold commission gives the task of Peter a distinct note of solemnity. This work of shepherding the flock is one that will be done at great personal sacrifice. This is made clear in the following verses: “Truly, truly, … Follow Me!” (John 21:18-19).

In Peter's younger days he did as he pleased. In his later years, he would become subject to the will of others. In particular, John spelled out that these words of Jesus were a prediction that Peter would die the martyr's death (verse 19). Following Jesus would mean, for Peter, walking in His steps, even to death. No wonder our Lord's commission was given in such a serious manner.

Peter could not help but see John, who was following them at a distance (verse 20). Peter wondered if his fate was that common to the other disciples. What about John? Would he also be called upon to die the martyr's death (verse 21)? Our Lord informed Peter that this was not for Peter to concern himself with. His sole obligation was to follow His Lord in the path which was ordained for him.

Some who heard the report of the Lord's response to Peter were inclined to take His words to mean that John would not die (verse 23). But our Lord had only said that whether John lived or died, it was not Peter's concern. (I suspect that the real point of interest was whether or not our Lord was committing Himself to return before John died.)

Adapted from URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/40-duties-discipleship-john-211-25)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Following Jesus' ascension, Peter demonstrated his love for Christ and commitment to God's people. He played a key role in the first-century church (Acts 1:21-22; 2:14; 3:12; 4:8-20; 10:47-48). His declaration of commitment to Christ, even while imprisoned, came to fruition (5:17-42; 12:1-11). He grew from being "unschooled" and "ordinary" (4:13) to being the author of the two letters in the New Testament that bear his name. Although we don't know the circumstances of Peter's death, tradition suggests that he was crucified in Rome. Peter's story following Jesus' ascension is an important milestone marking his spiritual maturity. But we must not miss the formative issues of today's lesson. The most significant aspect of Peter's story may not be its beginning or ending but rather the remarkable turning point in the middle. Peter faced a painful low point in his life when he denied his Savior. We too will experience painful lows on our road to spiritual maturity, every Christian does. When such a low happens, the primary issue is how we respond. Peter heard Jesus speak of four possible outcomes in hearing the Word (see Matthew 13:1-9). Three of those are quite negative, but they need not be considered irreversible. God redeemed Peter's failure and used his weakness to strengthen his faith. The same can happen with us.