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For Diana Hunt,  
a dear friend  
who walks very closely with Christ

*“To ask that God’s love should be content with us as we are  
is to ask that God should cease to be God.”*



C. S. Lewis



# *Preface*

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If you are familiar with the New Testament Gospels, you know that a brash, rugged fisherman named Simon Peter walked very closely with our Lord Jesus Christ. One of my favorite Bible teachers summed up Peter's closeness to Christ in this memorable word picture: "I am sure that every time the Lord Jesus slowed down or stopped suddenly, the Apostle Peter ran right into the back of Him." From the moment his brother Andrew brought him to the Messiah until he watched Jesus ascend to the right hand of the Father, this brash, rugged fisherman dogged His Lord's steps.

Simon Peter loved Jesus Christ with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength — but he loved Him imperfectly because he was human. Although Peter was wholly committed to Christ, he did many things wrong. There must have been days when he wondered if he'd ever make it. I'm a lot like that, and you probably are too. That's why we identify with Peter so well, and have so much to learn from his example.

This study focuses on Peter's relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Each chapter deals with a critical episode in their relationship from which we can draw some valuable

life lessons. The study questions at the end of each lesson will encourage us to apply what we learn from Peter's example in our daily lives.

Seeking to walk in the footprints of the fisherman requires a worthwhile investment of time and energy. The Westminster Shorter Catechism declares that fulfilling our chief end of glorifying and enjoying God is inextricably linked to "doing the Word" (See Q/A 1 & 2). Thus, if we want to walk worthy of our high calling in Christ (and we do!), we must *make an effort* to understand and apply the great truths of the Bible. Many of those truths are exemplified in the lives of faithful disciples like Simon the fisherman. Getting to know him more intimately and striving to walk as he walked will help us fulfill the chief end for which we were created.

Before undertaking this study, you should know that I believe in and unashamedly teach the plenary inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of the Bible. I am also convinced that Reformed theology is the clearest and most accurate human restatement of God's revelation in Scripture.

If you are new to Bible study or are uncertain about the inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, authority, or sufficiency of Scripture, please lay this study aside and investigate the validity of the truth claims the Bible makes for itself.<sup>1</sup> You will benefit more fully from Bible study when you understand the *uniqueness* of God's revelation in Scripture. If you are unfamiliar with the term "Reformed Theology," please read Appendix A, "What is Reformed Theology?" before beginning this study.

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Bible study is a serious task that requires physical, mental, and spiritual preparation to be done well. Study when you are well-rested and alert. Establish a time and place that is quiet, free of distractions, and conducive to concentration. Get in the habit of taking notes on what you read, and develop a filing system that will enable you to access those notes in the future. Expect Bible study to challenge you and stretch your thinking. Expect it to be difficult at times — but extremely rewarding. Always begin your study time in prayer. Ask the Lord to reveal sin in your life that needs to be confessed and cleansed, to help you concentrate on His truths, and to help you understand what He has written. End your study with a prayer for opportunities to *apply* what you have learned and for the wisdom to recognize those opportunities when they occur.

Remember that Bible study equips you *to glorify God and enjoy Him forever*. You glorify God when your thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions accurately reflect God's character and nature to those around you. You enjoy God when you are fully satisfied and content in His providential ordering of the circumstances of your life. When your life consistently glorifies God and your joy is rooted in His sovereign providence, your impact on our fallen world will be nothing short of tremendous.

Each lesson in this study is followed by three types of questions: **Review**, **Applying the Word**, and **Digging Deeper**. The *Review* questions will help you determine how well you understood the lesson material by challenging you to express the key points of the lesson in your own words. *Applying the Word* questions encourage you to put your understanding of the lesson to work in your daily life, and

*Digging Deeper* questions challenge you to pursue further study in certain areas.

You should be able to find the answers to the *Review* questions in the lesson material itself, but please resist the temptation to copy words or phrases out of the book. Work hard at putting these ideas into your own words. Being able to do this indicates that you have *understood* what you have read. Ask yourself, "How would I explain this idea to someone else if I didn't have the book with me?"

Try to answer at least one of the *Applying the Word* questions. If you do not have time to answer all of them, pray over them and ask the Lord to show you which one(s) *He* wants you to work on. These applications should take some time and thought because, to be effective, they must be answered specifically instead of in vague generalities.

An example illustrating the difference between vague generalities and specific applications might be helpful here. If you are applying the truths found in Philippians 2:3-4 about regarding others as more important than yourself by looking out for their interests, a vague generality would be: "I need to be more helpful and kind to those around me." A specific application would be: "I will call my daughter this morning (who lives in a sorority house on the local college campus) and cheerfully offer to edit her term paper while she studies for her final exams. If she accepts my offer, I will do my Saturday chores on Friday, leaving Saturday free to help her." Do you see the difference? A specific application answers the questions:

Who? My daughter.

What? Call her, volunteer to edit her paper, and reschedule my chores.

When? Call this morning at 10AM, edit the paper on Saturday, and do the chores on Friday.

Where? Call from my home. Edit the paper at her sorority house library.

How? Cheerfully.

A vague generality does not answer these questions. You can make specific applications in the areas of your thinking, your attitudes, and your behavior. (See Lesson 6 of my Light for Your Path study, *Turning on the Light* for more information about how to make specific applications.)

*Digging Deeper* questions usually require a significant amount of time and effort to complete. They were designed to provide a challenge for Christians who are eager for more advanced study. Don't assume that you are "supposed" to do all (or any) of these. Read them, and if you find one that intrigues you, spend several weeks (or several months!) working on it. You may end up writing a book of your own.

As you get to know Simon Peter as you work through this study, remember that your motivation should be growth in Christlikeness for the glory of God. Growth requires you to stretch beyond where you are now. Spiritual stretching is often painful and difficult, but it is always rewarding. If you need help with your work, ask your pastor, one of your church leaders, or a mature Christian friend to work with you. They will almost assuredly be delighted to do so.

If you are doing this study with a group, please resist the temptation to compare yourself with other Christians in the group. Do not be intimidated by someone whose notebook is bulging with insightful answers to every question, and do not feel superior to someone who struggled to answer only one or two questions. Rather, bear in mind that growth in Christlikeness occurs as we learn and apply God's truth "a little here, a little there" (Isaiah 28:10), and that we do not all grow at the same rate or in the same way. The issue is not how many questions you answered or how well you expressed yourself. The issue is whether or not you have moved beyond where you were when you started the lesson. If you have, you are growing. And that's why you are studying!

May our great God richly bless your diligent efforts to learn from Simon's example and to walk in his footprints.

At the time of Christ, most people knew that "all roads led to Rome." That's because Rome built those roads as

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**Notes:**

1. The following books are among the many helpful resources that will help you investigate the claims the Bible makes for itself:

James M. Boice, *Standing On the Rock*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994.

R. Will Butler, *God Speaks: What the Bible Teaches About Itself*. Los Alamos, N.M.: Deo Volente Publishing

John MacArthur, Jr., *You Can Trust the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1988.

Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1972, 1979.

Carol J. Ruvolo, *A Book Like No Other: What's So Special About the Bible*. Phillipsburg, N. J.: P & R Publishing Co., 1998.

R. C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*. Orlando Fla.: Ligonier Ministries, 1980, 1996.

B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948.

*“The secret of Christian influence  
is the society of the Christian’s Master.”*



Hugh Martin

# Chapter 1

## *Peter's Footprints All Lead to Christ*

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a means of maintaining world rule by tightly controlling commerce and government. Rome's roads were an integral part of the seemingly solid foundation upon which her empire rested. But like all worldly support systems, it had fatal flaws. And those flaws allowed those very roads to be used by the hoards of barbarians who eventually overthrew one of the world's greatest Empires. All roads still led to Rome for awhile after her fall, but tragically, there was no longer any real reason to go there.

In much the same way (but with one stunning exception), the example of faithful saints all lead to God. Their lives, their words, and their prayers direct us toward the way, the truth, and the life. As they exercise the rich gifts of God's Spirit and pour themselves out in worship and service, the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him is dispersed in every place. They leave footprints for us that point out the narrow way of faith in Christ Jesus which alone leads to God. And as we walk in those footprints, we leave footprints for others.

The examples of one group of those faithful saints — the apostles and prophets — form the foundation of God's

church in the world. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of that foundation. As such, He gives His Church the solid, attractive integrity that makes it the glorious dwelling of God's Holy Spirit. The foundation comprised of the apostles and prophets and one perfect cornerstone supports the Church much as Rome's roads supported her Empire — except that it has no fatal flaws. That's because it's comprised of God's inspired revelation: the Incarnate Christ and the writings of Scripture. The foundation that God has laid down for His Church is perfectly solid and unable to crack. It will support without fail what He builds upon it.

God builds His Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets through the work of His people who submit to His Spirit. That's why Paul advises us in 1 Corinthians to be careful how we build upon that foundation. "Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (3:12-16).

What a privilege to be involved in building God's church in the world! As we add walls, rooms, furnishings, and adornments to His perfect foundation, we glorify God as we rely on His power and reflect His attributes. But with that great privilege comes great responsibility. When we fail to submit to God's Holy Spirit, we build upon God's foundation with wood, hay, and straw — worldly, self-reliant

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materials that do not display the glory of God. Only the works of obedience will shine as gold, silver, and precious stones reflecting God's nature in our fallen world.

All of us want the work that we do in the church to withstand the refining fire of God's judgment. None of us want to see years of hard work go up in smoke on judgment day. How can we be encouraged to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our toil is not in vain in the Lord? There is only one way. By studying God's Word and applying His truth in our daily lives. The examples of faithful saints recorded in Scripture will help us to do that.

### *A Pattern for Discipleship*

Almost two thousand years ago, a small group of men stood on a mountain with the resurrected Lord Jesus and listened while He issued His Church her marching orders: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

In the Greek language this Great Commission contains one imperative verb and three participles, indicating that Jesus was issuing a single command along with instructions about how to fulfill it. The command is "make disciples," and the instructions are "go," "baptize," and "teach." Jesus also infused the Commission with profound motivation by affirming that He had been given all authority in heaven

and on earth, and that He would be with them until the end of the age.

The men who heard these words from the mouth of our Lord knew precisely *what* they were to do, *how* they were to do it, and *why* they must do it. They were to make disciples. They were to do that work by going into all the world, baptizing converts into the family of God, and teaching them to obey the commands of Christ. They must do that work because they had been commissioned by the Ultimate Authority who had also promised to go with them, equip them, and give them success.

Those men were well qualified to accept their Commission, because Jesus Christ had made disciples of them. Commissioning them to make disciples of others set the standard and pattern for the work of the Church in the world. Believers in Jesus Christ are first required to be His disciples and then to go and make disciples of others.

Discipling is at the very heart of the work of the Church, and it must be done in accord with the biblical pattern. That biblical pattern is clearly depicted in the life of Simon Peter. He was an exemplary disciple and a model discipler, not only because of the things he did right, but also because of the things he did wrong. Fallen sinners learn best from those who teach by their words and by their examples both how to obey and how to repent.

### ***A Little Help From a Friend***

Peter's example in Scripture encourages us to walk in his footprints because it is so realistic. When the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of Scripture to tell us so much about

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Peter, they painted an accurate picture that has helped a myriad of saints down through the ages.

When we look at Peter, we see a man who was sometimes clear-sighted and sometimes confused, sometimes appealing and sometimes exasperating, sometimes quite humble and sometimes quite arrogant, sometimes courageous and sometimes fainthearted. We see a man who loved the Lord deeply and was committed to serving Him well. But we also see a man who was immature in His faith and thus often in trouble. We see a man who, although very weak, was also chosen of God, beloved by God's Son, and indwelt by God's Holy Spirit. In short, we see a man who was a great deal like us. We can identify with him, and that helps us learn from him.

Peter walked down the same kinds of roads that we're called to walk. He climbed the same kinds of hills, reclined in the same kinds of green pastures, detoured around the same kinds of roadblocks, fell into the same kinds of potholes, and arrived safely in heaven. Peter's example makes an excellent road map for those whom Christ has called to be His disciples. Patterning our lives after the fisherman's can help us walk worthy of our high calling in Christ.

The writers of Scripture gave us a realistic picture of Peter (and of many other saints also) both to encourage us and to warn us as we serve our Lord Jesus. Peter was a great disciple of Christ, but he was also a great sinner. And the presence of sin in his life consistently drove him to the foot of the Cross. Peter's obvious, undeniable flaws — and his response to them — remind us of our total dependence upon God's enablement as we work out our salvation.

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Peter's example encourages us by affirming that the presence of sin in our lives doesn't mean we aren't Christians, nor does it invalidate our witness for Christ. Although it is true that modern-day Christianity is far too undemanding of its adherents, we must not fall into the snare of expecting perfection of ourselves or others. One of the most effective means of proclaiming God's grace in our dying culture is acknowledging sin and seeking forgiveness through earnest repentance.

Our highly tolerant, psychologised culture no longer accepts the biblical concept of sin. "Sin," as defined in God's Word, has been redefined by society in terms of mistakes, failures, dysfunction, maladjustment, co-dependence, victimization, poor self-esteem, or faulty socialization. On those rare occasions when we do hear the word "sin" bravely (or snidely) bandied about, its context is usually our relationships with each other instead of our fallen condition before a holy and righteous God.

Although you and I grieve over this state of affairs, we should be quick to see an opportunity here. Our own sins provide us with a platform to teach, by our example, a biblical concept of sin and to display the glory of God's gracious forgiveness. Those who know us well should see and hear us confessing our sin for what it really is — transgression of God's commands. They should see us repenting for the right reason — because our behavior is offensive to God. And they should see us honor Him with our thanksgiving and joy when we receive His gracious, cleansing forgiveness. Our families, our neighbors, and our friends and associates should *understand* the biblical concept of sin (even if they refuse to accept it) because they have seen it lived out in our daily activities.

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Peter's example also encourages us by reminding us that we *grow* in grace. Growth, by definition, is an ongoing process, not an instantaneous occurrence. As we follow Peter through the Gospels and on into Acts, we see a man who is growing in grace. When we read his epistles, we see a man who has grown even more. He did not attain perfection in this world, but as he walked with the Lord, he became wiser, stronger, and more self-controlled. How did he do it? By putting aside sinful behavior and longing for the pure milk of the Word. His own words proclaim that this is the way that God's children grow in respect to salvation (1 Peter 2:1-2). Watching him grow encourages us as we grow. It also encourages us to be patient with others as they grow. The oft-heard reminder, "God isn't finished with me yet," although trite, is still true.

Peter's example in Scripture is also a warning to his fellow believers. Although sin should not discourage us in our walk with the Lord, neither should it ever be taken lightly. Sin is always serious and damaging. We should hate it, defend against it, and grieve over it. We should be quick to repent in dust and ashes, and even quicker to mistrust and discount our deceitful hearts. We must never forget that we are *sinners* saved by grace, and that until we are glorified, we will remain highly vulnerable to vicious assaults from the world, the flesh, and the devil. As we seek to serve Christ in our redeemed fallen condition, the wise prayer of the psalmist should be always in mind:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
Try me and know my anxious thoughts;  
And see if there be any hurtful way in me,  
And lead me in the everlasting way.*  
(139:23-24)

I imagine that Peter, the great saint who was also a great sinner, knew his weakness so well that he prayed this prayer constantly.

### *The Heartbeat of Discipleship*

Although Peter was weak, he had great faith in Christ. His great faith had not been dredged up from the depths of his own human weakness; rather, it had come directly from God at the time of his salvation. Great faith always expresses itself in deep love for the Lord and great desire to obey Him. And Peter's great faith was no exception. His often imperfect but completely devoted commitment to Christ reflects the strong, healthy heartbeat of Christian discipleship. Peter's example personifies Jesus' words to His own: "If you love Me, you will obey my commandments" (John 14:15).

Peter's deep love for the Lord motivated the boldness we see in his actions. No cold-hearted man would have stepped out on the stormy waters of Galilee, proclaimed Jesus to be the Incarnate Messiah, or hacked off Malchus' ear with a swiftly-drawn sword. Nor would a cold-hearted man have rebuked the Incarnate Messiah he had just professed, arrogantly over-estimated his own steadfastness, or despaired completely when that overconfidence failed.

Peter's boldness and courage, evident in both his obedience and his sin, sprang from hot, passionate zeal rather than lukewarm indifference. Of course, Peter's passion is no excuse for his sin, but it tells us his heart was in the right place. And when a believer's heart is in the right place, he is highly sensitive to the Holy Spirit's conviction. Peter's great love for the Lord stimulated repentance which gave God an arena in which to display the grace of forgiveness.

Peter's commitment to Christ is a good example for us because it patterns obedience and repentance so well. As we embark on this study and learn to walk in his footprints, my prayer is that *our example* will do the same thing for others.

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## Review Questions

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1. What was the secret of Peter's great influence both during his lifetime and throughout Christian history?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 3:9-17, Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Timothy 6:17-19, 2 Timothy 2:19, and Revelation 21:14-20. Explain the similarities and differences between worldly support systems and the spiritual support system we have in the foundation comprised of the apostles, prophets, and Christ the cornerstone. Then describe how we should build upon the spiritual foundation God has laid down, and the importance of accepting the responsibility of building upon that foundation.
3. Read Matthew 28:18-20. What is the single command in those verses (the imperative verb)? What are the three instructions supporting that single command (the participles)? What two motivations does Jesus add that encourage us to obey the command by following the instructions in these verses? Explain Jesus' marching orders for His Church in your own words. According to Jesus, what is *your* responsibility as a member of His Church? List some ways you may fulfill this responsibility in your own sphere of influence.
4. Describe several ways that Peter's example has helped Christians down through the centuries carry out Christ's Great Commission. Be sure to include both the encouragements and the warnings we find in his example.
5. How does great faith express itself? Can you think of some specific ways in which Peter's great faith expressed itself in his life?

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## **Applying the Word**

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1. This week begin memorizing one or more of the following verses:  
    Psalm 139:23-24  
    Matthew 28:18-20  
    John 14:15
2. Read 1 Corinthians 3:9-17 and 15:58. Use a dictionary if necessary to help you define the words "steadfast," "immovable," "abounding," "toil," and "vain." Now spend some time thinking about a typical week in your life. Are your routine daily activities, attitudes, and thoughts characteristic of someone who is steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord? Explain, citing specific examples. Review the lesson material and explain how the example of Peter's obedience and sinfulness might help you gain assurance that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (Hint: Think about what prompted Peter's obedience and how he responded to his sins.)

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**Digging Deeper**

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1. Read Jesus' marching orders to His Church recorded in Matthew 28:18-20, paying particular attention to His use of the words "all" and "always" in those verses. Spend some time studying and meditating on Jesus' words and then explain the significance of the following phrases:
  - a. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."
  - b. "make disciples of *all* nations"
  - c. "teaching them to observe *all* that I commanded you"
  - d. "I am with you *always*"

Then explain how Jesus defines discipleship in these verses. What activities are you currently pursuing that will enhance your effectiveness as a disciple of Christ? What activities are you currently pursuing that will hinder your effectiveness as a disciple of Christ? What changes do you need to make in your activities? Make a specific step-by-step plan to begin making those changes. (Be sure that your plan answers the questions: Who?, What?, When?, Where?, and How?.)