



## What does the Scripture say?

### *Walking with Christ* Selected Texts

#### Introduction:

Jesus has a plan for our lives. He prayed in **John 17:3**: “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*” So we can clearly see that, according to Jesus, eternal life – the essence of life as God’s intends it – is to know Him.

Of course, once we come to experience God’s salvation, we are not immediately taken up to heaven. Rather, we live on the earth for a time. We learn to walk with Christ. We learn more and more about Jesus’ plan for our lives. This “learning” happens through life’s “ups and downs,” but Christ is accomplishing His plan for us all along the way.

We could look at a Biblical example of walking with Christ from many people found in the Scriptures. However, one example that is very clear is the life of Peter. The life of Peter is a picture of how Christ calls us to walk with Him and how He works in our lives to fulfill His plan for us. We will consider Peter’s life as an example of someone who walked with Christ under four points.

#### **1. Purpose (Matthew 4:18-20)**

Although Jesus’ first meeting with Peter is mentioned in John 1:40-42, most people locate Christ’s special “call” to Peter in Matthew 4:18-20. This call can be summarized in two words: *Follow Me*.

By the time we come to the story of Jesus’ call to Peter in Matthew 4:18-20, Jesus had been preaching for some time. Peter had already met Jesus, and the news about Christ was spreading among many people. However, Christ issued a call to Peter (and to others like Andrew, James, and John) to follow Him and to become “fishers of men.” Basically, Jesus told Peter that his life’s purpose was not boats and nets and literal fish in the lake. Rather, his purpose was to follow Christ and to be used by Him to make an impact in the lives of others.

Of course, this call meant a radical decision and transformation in Peter’s life. In Matthew 4:18-20, we read that Peter left “[his] nets” to follow Christ. Henry Blackaby simply but profoundly says in his classic work *Experiencing God*: “You cannot stay the way you are and go with God.”<sup>1</sup> This makes perfect sense. If God is calling us to embrace His purpose, He transforms us in Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1990), 19.



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Like Peter, we all have our desires and directions carved out for our lives. Since we were children, people have asked us: What do you want to be when you grow up? Then, when we come to know Christ, the question suddenly and radically changes to: What does God want me to be? Jesus really asks all His disciples to follow Him and to be fishers of men. Although we all have our hands buried in our nets and plans and dreams, Christ calls us to embrace *His purpose* for our lives. He calls us to follow Him and to see Him use us to make an eternal impact in the lives of others.

### 2. Peaks and Pits (Matthew 16:13-20; 26:69-75)

Walking with Christ daily has its shares of “ups and downs” in this world. Sometimes we submit to His leadership by the power of the Spirit, and we experience unbelievable peaks of victory and joy. Other times, we rely on our selves, and we plummet into the pits of defeat and pain.

We can easily see both “peaks and pits” in Peter’s life. For example, one of the classic “peak” moments for Peter is found in Matthew 16:13-20. In this passage, Jesus asks His disciples what people are saying about Him. After they give Christ a report of the popular opinion polls, He asks them what *they* say about Him. In this moment, Peter speaks on behalf of all the disciples and confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus, then, responds by saying that Peter is “blessed” because God had revealed His true identity to him. So we can see clearly that Peter could not take any personal credit for this “peak” moment. *God* revealed the truth to Peter, and he was blessed because of *God’s work* in his life.

We can also see instances of “pit” moments in Peter’s story. The classic example of this is Peter’s infamous denials of Christ. Of course, before Peter denied Jesus, he boasted that he would never deny Christ (see Matthew 26:31-35). In fact, Peter not only insisted that he would never deny Christ; he also insisted that he would even die with Christ! Yet, all of his boasting betrayed his self-confidence and led to one of his most glaring down-falls in life. After Peter fell flat on his face that very night, he wept bitterly for days.

All of us who know Christ experience “peaks and pits” in our walk with Christ. And what is true of Peter’s victories and defeats are also true of our victories and defeats. When we rely on God, we experience His power for victory. This doesn’t mean that life’s always “easy” when we rely on God, but it does mean that God’s power is greater than all our struggles. Yet, when we rely on ourselves, we taste the bitterness of failure. So the bottom line of all these experiences is whether or not we are relying on God or on ourselves.



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The good news is that God uses both our “peaks and pits” to teach us how to rely on Him more consistently. When we trust Him and experience victory, this reinforces what His Word calls us to do in all circumstances. When we trust ourselves and experience defeat, this reinforces what His Word tells us regarding our sin and the devastating consequences of self-reliance.

### 3. Patience (John 21:15-22)

Living through the “peaks and pits” of life is a continual process for us in this world. We’re not perfect; we’re imperfect. We’re not consistent; we’re inconsistent. We’re also “slow learners” most of the time. But, even though we might be tempted to give up on ourselves, God doesn’t give up on His children. He patiently instructs and restores us in every pit we find ourselves.

Peter certainly knew the power of Christ’s patience and restoration in his life. After he wept bitterly because of his sin of denying Jesus three times, Christ patiently restored Peter. John 21:15-22 recounts this powerful moment for us. At the beginning of John 21, we find Peter back in “old territory” as he, along with some others, goes fishing. This is where Jesus found Peter when He first issued His call to Peter to follow Him. It’s likely that as Peter was wallowing in the painful pit of his most recent failure, he decided to go back to life as he knew it. Simply put: He gave up on himself.

But Jesus hadn’t given up on Him. After three statements of restoration – invitations for Peter to express his love to Christ and to minister to others – Jesus twice voiced a familiar call to Peter at the end of verses 19 and 22 with the two simple words: *Follow Me*.

We must take to heart a very important truth about how Jesus worked in Peter’s life because this is how He desires to work in all our lives. Our failures do not spell the end of our walk with Christ. Jesus patiently works to teach us more about what it means to follow Him even through the pain of our failures. Paul says in **Philippians 1:6**, “*Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*” Sin doesn’t have the last word in our lives; Jesus, our Savior, has the last word in our lives! And by God’s grace, we can respond to our failures in such a way that every pit we face gives way to the beginning of the next climb to another peak.

### 4. Perseverance (1 Peter 1:3-9)

This is why we need to finish this message with the word “perseverance” because Peter didn’t move on with perfection in his life. On the contrary, he still experienced more “peaks and pits” in his walk with Christ.



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For example, Peter preached the inaugural message of the Church in Acts 2 where about 3,000 people were saved. This was a huge “catch of fish!” He also relied on God’s power to stand up under the pressure and pain of persecution and prison in Acts 4-5 and 12. Lastly, Peter was involved in seeing how the Gospel was spreading beyond the Jews to the Samaritans in Acts 8 and the Gentiles in Acts 10.

Yet, Peter also failed in other ways in his life. For instance, Paul rebukes Peter face-to-face and publicly in Galatians 2:11-21 because Peter acted hypocritically and contrary to the truth of the Gospel on this particular occasion. Basically, Peter allowed fear to distort his judgment, and he catered to some people while shunning others. When Paul saw this hypocrisy in Peter’s life and how it was negatively impacting others like Barnabas as well, he rebuked Peter for his sin.

The point to take from the examples of Peter’s “peaks and pits” above is simply to understand that we all continue to grow in our walk with Christ. We will continue to experience victory, and we will continue to experience defeat. However, God wants to cultivate perseverance in our lives through all of the ebb and flow of our walk with Christ. **James 1:2-4** says, “*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*”

All of us want to learn the “easy way” in the sense that none of us enjoy pain, but the reality is that we don’t all learn the “easy way” because most of us learn more from our “pits” than we do our “peaks” in life. This is why it crucial for us to grow in perseverance since God is working daily in our lives as we learn to walk with Christ through our victories and our defeats.

### **Conclusion:**

We might wonder: What ever happened to Peter? Surely we know that he eventually died and went to heaven, but there’s an interesting story about Peter’s death in the tradition of the Church that really sums up well all that we have said and sought to learn about his life from the pages of Scripture. While we shouldn’t press the details of this story below from Church tradition, we can nevertheless appreciate its main point in light as it relates to this message.

The tradition has it that Nero sought to execute Peter. But when some Believers learned of Nero’s plan, they begged Peter to escape from the city. After Peter listened to them and was leaving the city, he saw Jesus entering the gate of the city to meet him. At this point, Peter worshipped Christ and asked Him where He was going. Jesus replied,



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“I’m coming to die!” When Peter heard Jesus speak these words, he realized that Christ was really speaking of His call to Peter to suffer and die (see John 21:18). So Peter returned to the city, and he was executed. Church tradition says that Peter was crucified upside down because he didn’t feel worthy to suffer in the same position as Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Once again, we see even in this tradition that Peter struggled in his walk with Christ all the way to the end. Yet, by God’s grace he finished his race well.

And we can and will finish our walk with Christ well if we walk by God’s grace, too. By Christ’s power we respond to Christ’s call in our lives to follow Him. By Christ’s strength we persevere through all the “peaks and pits” of life. By God’s grace He brings us home for His glory and honor as our walk with Christ comes to a close in this life and we enter our heavenly home!