

Underdogs

“Peter – The History of the Future”

Luke 22, John 21, Acts 2

Small Group Plan

If you saw a university class with the title, “*The History of the Future*,” what would you think it would be about? How could someone teach the history of the future? How can history help us move into the future?

Think about yourself for a minute. When you were a child, what did you dream of becoming? By your senior year in high school, how had those plans changed? And looking at your life now, how many of your plans actually occurred just as you thought they would? How did they change? Why did they change?

Now think about an example from scripture. As a boy, Peter probably dreamed of following in the family business, even though fishing was a hard life and required both determination and leadership. Later, as a young man, Peter’s plans changed. He left his fishing business and followed Jesus, but his reasons had not yet found clarity. At first, his motives were political and his own agenda kept him from seeing Jesus’ agenda. There was tension and arguments (Mark 8:32). Later still, after Jesus’ death and resurrection, Peter’s plans changed once again as he became an early spokesman for the Christian movement (Acts 2:14).

Looking back over his entire life, what changed and what remained the same in Peter’s life? What did his history reveal about his future?

Sometimes this is called “Faith in Process” and the steps are often as difficult as they are predictable as a person moves from one level of commitment to another. Think about the steps that Peter went through as he changed from the proud Peter who argued with Jesus to the humble Peter who represented Jesus.

Step 1 – **Pride** – *He wouldn’t listen, and he didn’t learn.*

Step 2 – **Failure** – *He fell on his face as his agenda unraveled.*

Step 3 – **Bewilderment** – *He wandered around in shock and uncertainty.*

Step 4 – **Listening** – *He finally began to face his own neediness.*

Step 5 – **Learning** – *His heart began to open, and he finally began to see.*

Step 6 – **Change** – *With the door now open God brought deeper transformation.*

In his classic book, **The Sacred Journey**, Frederick Buechner writes:

“... to grit your teeth and clench your fists in order to survive the world at its harshest and worst – is, by that very act, to be unable to let something be done for you and in you that is more wonderful still ... the one thing a clenched fist cannot do is accept ... a helping hand.” (page 46)

Peter eventually unclenched his fists, and while God began to change Peter’s heart, He left Peter’s personality intact. In fact, God dramatically brought Peter’s history in the future as He used Peter’s determination, drive and leadership to launch the Christian movement.

And so, let’s go back to where we started – the history of the future. What have you tried? Where have you failed? How have you learned? What have you changed?

It’s the history of your future.

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- Can you think of a ministry that was born out of a person’s failure?
- How did the failure contribute to the direction and success of the ministry?

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

— PETER FAILING —

Luke 22:54-62

⁵⁴ Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. ⁵⁶ A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “This man was with him.” ⁵⁷ But he denied it. “Woman, I don’t know him,” he said. ⁵⁸ A little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” “Man, I am not!” Peter replied. ⁵⁹ About an hour later another asserted, “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.” ⁶⁰ Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” ⁶² And he went outside and wept bitterly.

- Follow the trail of Peter’s struggle: “Peter followed ... ”
“Peter sat down ... ”
“he denied it ... ”
“Peter replied ... ”
“Peter replied ... ”
“Peter remembered ... ”
“he wept bitterly ... ”

- When everyone else deserted Jesus, why did Peter continue to follow, even if it was “at a distance?”
- Why did he risk entering into the high priest’s courtyard?
- After following Jesus to the house of the high priest, why did he then deny knowing him?
- What was Peter thinking and feeling as he “wept bitterly?”

— PETER LISTENING —

John 21:15-19

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶ Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” ¹⁷ The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but 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.” ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

- The first time Jesus asks Peter if he loves him, Jesus uses the word for unselfish, sacrificial love, *agape*, while Peter answers with the not so selfless word for close friend, *phileo* (v. 15). When Jesus asks a second time, he again uses *agape* and Peter again uses *phileo* (v. 16). Finally, Jesus drops down and uses Peter’s word *phileo* (v. 17) saying in effect, “When I ask if you love me, you say you are my good friend. But what I really need to know, how good of a friend are you.”
- Why couldn’t Peter use the word for unselfish love?
- Why did it hurt Peter when Jesus asked the third time?
- What is Peter beginning to learn about himself and how will it help him?

— PETER MINISTERING —

ACTS 2:14

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.

ACTS 4:13

¹³ 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.

- What qualified Peter to be the initial spokesperson for the early Christian movement?
- Why is it ironic for Peter to say, “*listen carefully?*”
- What had Jesus given to Peter and to John that “*astonished*” those who heard them speak?
- In terms of time, pain, patience, and forgiveness, describe what was required for Jesus to bring change to Peter’s heart and life?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- Why is it true that no one is beyond hope?
- In today’s world does failure usually qualify or disqualify a person? Explain.
- How is Jesus’ strategy (time, attitude, action) for bringing spiritual formation into a person’s life different from the strategy (time, attitude, action) of today’s culture?
- How long do you think the early Peter would have lasted in one of our religious organizations today?
- Close in prayer thanking God for the change we see in Peter and for the amazing love and forgiveness from Jesus that made that change occur.