IDENTITY (3): UPS AND DOWNS
The Importance of But

November 30, 2019

1 PREPARING

A. THE SOURCE

Acts 4:13 (NIV) • “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.”

1 Corinthians 16:13, 14 (NIV) • “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.”

Hebrews 3:1-6 (NIV) • “Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God’s house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. ‘Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house,’ bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.”

Acts 3:6 (NIV) • “Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’ ”

Acts 4:18-20 (NIV) • “Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, ‘Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’ ”

Acts 10:34, 35 (NIV) • “Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.’ ”

Acts 12:5 (NIV) • “So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.”

B. WHAT’S TO BE SAID ABOUT “IDENTITY (3): UPS AND DOWNS”

The third lesson in the four-part series focuses on the third member of Jesus’ inner circle. Again, those who were closest to Jesus can be examples of how an intimate walk with Christ not only reshapes our ideas about His kingdom but secures in us a healthy sense of identity as a child of God. Peter is probably the focal point of the disciples on many occasions because of his vocal leadership. But Peter’s track record is a series of ups and downs in his discovery of what Jesus is all about and who
he, Peter, is in relation to Christ. Peter’s journey is marked by extreme humility to brazen promises that were never kept. Peter articulated who Jesus was but had much to learn about how that translated to the kingdom of God. Ultimately, Peter’s experience culminates in a clear vision of who He is and what He has to offer. For teens, Peter’s discovery about Jesus can be helpful in understanding that we know Christ over time, and we know who we are over time as well.

C. WHERE WE’RE GOING WITH “IDENTITY (3): UPS AND DOWNS”

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:
1. Survey the life of Peter to mark the major parts of his growth.
2. Discover what Peter knew to be true of Christ and how that changed Peter.
3. Choose to live with a firm conviction about who God is and an open mind about who we might become.

D. MATERIALS NEEDED

Beginning • (Activity A) photo or illustration, paper and pencil; (Activity B) same as Activity A.

Connecting • Bibles, student lessons, handout (p. 99), pens or pencils.

Applying • Bibles.

2 BRIDGING

A. WHERE WE’VE BEEN

Allow 10 minutes at the beginning of class for students to:
1. Share anything that was meaningful to them in this lesson.
2. Engage in a discussion about the topic of the lesson in connection to the belief highlighted this week.
3. Say the Bible memory text either individually or in a group.
4. Review the “Applying” section of their Friday lesson (if needed).

B. OTHER SABBATH SCHOOL COMPONENTS

>> Song service
>> Mission emphasis (find a link for Adventist Mission for youth and adults at www.realtimefaith.net)
>> Service project reports

3 BEGINNING

NOTE TO TEACHER: Put together your own program with options from the categories below—Beginning, Connecting, Applying, and Closing. Please keep in mind, however, that the students need to have an opportunity to be interactive (participate actively and with one another) and to study from the Word.

A. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate how the closer we get to something, the better we can see it. As we get closer to Christ we discover and experience more about who He is—as though we were getting closer to a picture.

Get set • You will need a picture that has enough detail (photo, painting or cartoon) so that the closer you get to it, the better you understand the picture. Test this first at home. The students will each need a writing utensil and a piece of paper. They will be coached to step forward and write what they see.

Go • Invite the class to line up at one end of the room with a pencil and a piece of paper with which to take notes. Then tape the picture you have chosen on the opposite wall and coach the
class to take one step forward. They are to write what they see in the picture under the heading “step one.” Coach them to take another step, observe what they see that they had not seen before and write it down on heading “step two,” and so on. At some critical points have them write down in one to five words what they think they see in the overall picture.

Debriefing • Ask: How is this experience like getting to know people? How is it like getting to know God? How accurate were your statements of what you were seeing? If you were to compare this experience with that of someone like Peter, at what critical moments in his life did he get a better, clearer picture of who Jesus was?

B. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • This exercise demonstrates how time enhances our abilities to observe and know something. Using the same picture (or another one as long as it has a lot of detail) students will write down what they see. One group of students will have only one brief moment to look at the picture, and others will get to have plenty of time and even be able to discuss its attributes with the rest of their team. A discussion will follow that draws them into considering how time with Jesus shaped Peter in positive ways.

Get set • Divide the class into two groups and have the picture ready to be displayed. The first group is allowed only 20 seconds with the picture, and they cannot say a word. They are to be ushered out of the room. The other group is brought in to spend five minutes talking about the details of the painting.

Go • For each group say: Your job is to try to remember as much detail about the painting as you can in the time I give you. Go. The first group gets 20 seconds. The second group gets about five minutes. In separate places, have the two groups write out a collective description of the picture with as many details as possible. Then bring them together and have them share their lists. Comment on the things that one group observed that the other didn’t. It should turn out that the group that spent more time with the painting will have more to say. If that is not the case, have them process that information as well.

Debriefing • Ask: To what degree does having more time to observe the picture enhance your ability to understand the picture better? Does more time necessarily mean that people will use it wisely? What was helpful in trying to remember the details? How could this exercise be compared to knowing people? In what ways did Peter have a better chance of knowing Jesus than some of the other disciples had? In what ways did that turn out not to be the case?

A. CONNECTING TO THE KINGDOM

Present the following ideas in your own words:

One thing is true about citizens in God’s kingdom: no one is perfect, and no one gives up. It’s part of knowing the King that the closer we get to Him, the more we understand Him. This process takes time, and we usually learn a lot about ourselves on the journey. But with each step closer we see Him more clearly. Even through our mistakes and misunderstandings about Him or His kingdom, we discover new and better ways to follow Him. This is seen clearly in Peter’s life. He often gets a bad reputation for being hot-tempered, not so bright, and somewhat brave-hearted for Christ. The last part is really the most important quality—to Christ.

In this section it will be essential to survey Peter’s life to get an idea of what he learned about Jesus and what he learned about himself. In doing so, we might learn something about ourselves.
Distribute the handout on page 99, which portrays major sections of Peter’s life with Jesus.

**Say:** There are texts for you to look up to get the whole story. In groups of three or four, read this summary of Peter’s life and answer the questions given on the handout. Be prepared to share your answers with others.

**B. CONNECTING TO THE LESSON ILLUSTRATION**

Ask someone beforehand to read or tell the story from Sabbath’s section of the lesson.

**Ask:** What connection do you see between the waterskiing story and Peter’s life (either specific stories or generally)? What lessons can we learn from both events?

**C. CONNECTING TO LIFE**

Pose the following scenario:

Sometimes the most difficult people to be patient with are the ones who are closest to us. Sometimes it’s difficult to see their growth because we are too close. There is a wonderful little church in the Midwest of the United States that had 37 members. Most, if not all, had been together for decades and knew one another very well. One young person who had grown up in that church, but who had been away for high school, college, and now hundreds of miles away for work, decided to visit. He spent the afternoon with the church members and remarked at how they had changed so much. Mr. Hamilton seemed more patient with the pastor, and Gracie now allowed chocolate to be served at potluck. The church seemed friendlier and the atmosphere more alive than the way the young man remembered it. They were shocked by his observation!

**Ask:** What could the members of that church do to take a second look at one another and see one another the way those outside the circle might see them? How can we learn to be more patient with our own shortcomings and more positive about the good qualities the Spirit has already been working into us?

**5 APPLYING**

**A. APPLICATION ACTIVITY**

**Say:** One of the qualities that is so endearing about Peter is the way he used the word “but.” This conjunction separates two ideas in a sentence and seemingly a lot more in real life. You may have heard people say, “I really like you a lot . . . but,” or “That was a beautiful song . . . but,” or even “I want you to meet my parents . . . but.” It’s a powerful word, isn’t it? Here are a few texts that portray the way this word changes the direction of someone’s behavior, often calling them to take a leap of faith.

Read aloud Peter’s experience in Luke 5:1-11. Then **ask:** What did Peter learn about Jesus in this event? What did Peter learn about himself in this event?

Have small groups find the following verses and discuss what similarities they find between these other experiences of Peter and the story you just read: Acts 3:6; Acts 4:18-20; Acts 10:34-36; Acts 12:5.

Now have the small groups find the following verses and share what similarities they find between these experiences and those of Peter: Genesis 39:20, 21; Psalm 119:78; Psalm 119:95; Daniel 3:16-18.

**B. APPLICATION QUESTIONS**

1. Why do you think Peter was considered the leader among the disciples?
2. Who do you know today that reminds you of Peter? How do people treat them or relate to them?
3. What qualities do you admire most about Peter? Why?
4. Agree or disagree: Peter would not be half the leader he was for the New Testament church if he had not failed as much as he did. Explain.
CLOSING

In your own words, conclude with the following ideas:

The closer Peter got to Jesus, it seemed the more mistakes he made in his relationship with Him. But in a three-year period of time, Peter gave up his career and determined to follow Christ, even to death. Before the Resurrection Peter was a broken and devastated man—and after the Resurrection he was on fire with the Holy Spirit. But Peter continued to grow, and that growth included falling down and making mistakes.

Peter’s love and complete devotion to Jesus drove him into service for his Savior. Can you imagine how much shame he must have felt on the weekend of Jesus’ death? How could he show his face after making such a bold promise to never deny Him, even die for Him?

But as you see the whole picture, Peter’s life isn’t much different from ours. We have moments of greatness and ordinary times when we stumble and fall. Jesus made it clear by the way He welcomed Peter that we should keep trying, that He wants each of us to pick ourselves up when we fall and continue following Him.
The most prominent of Jesus’ 12 apostles, Peter is often portrayed as a bigmouthed fisherman. The picture of him in Scripture, however, is a rich, colorful picture of a pioneer.

**The First Apostle to Be Called.** Peter was married, because the Gospels mention that Jesus healed his mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14, 15). The apostle Paul later mentioned that Peter took his wife on his missionary travels (1 Corinthians 9:5). Peter and Andrew were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, and perhaps in partnership with James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Luke 5:10). In the midst of his labor as a fisherman, Peter received a call from Jesus that changed his life (Luke 5:8). The Gospel of John reports that Andrew and Peter were disciples of John the Baptist before they joined Jesus. John also reports that Peter was introduced to Jesus by his brother Andrew, who had already recognized Jesus to be the Messiah (John 1:35-42).

**The First Among the Apostles.** His name heads every list of the Twelve in the New Testament. He was apparently the strongest individual in the band. He frequently served as a spokesman for the disciples, and he was their recognized leader (Mark 1:36; Luke 22:32). Typical of Peter’s dominant personality was his readiness to walk to Jesus on the water (Matthew 14:28) and to ask Jesus the awkward question of how often he should forgive a sinning brother (Matthew 18:21). An inner circle of three apostles existed among the Twelve. Peter was also the leader of this small group. The trio—Peter, James, and John—was present with Jesus on a number of occasions. They witnessed the raising of a young girl from the dead (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51); they were present at Jesus’ transfiguration (Matthew 17:1, 2); and they were present during Jesus’ agony in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37; Mark 14:33). During Jesus’ final week in Jerusalem, two of the three, Peter and John, were sent to make preparations for their last meal together (Luke 22:8).

**The First Apostle to Verbally Acknowledge Jesus as Messiah.** The first apostle to recognize Jesus as the Messiah was Peter (the others may have thought it, but Peter was the only one willing to say it, Matthew 16:13-17). After the disciples voiced various rumors, Jesus put a more personal question to them, “But who do you say that I am?” (verse 15). Peter answered that He was Christ, the Son of the living God (verse 16).

**The First Apostle to Witness the Resurrection.** How ironic that the one who denied Jesus most vehemently in His hour of suffering should be the first person to witness to His resurrection from the dead. Yet according to Luke (Luke 24:34) and Paul (1 Corinthians 15:5), Peter was the first apostle to see the risen Lord. Peter was the spokesperson at Pentecost (Acts 2) and continued to lead the new church after Christ had ascended to heaven.

**The First Apostle to Proclaim Salvation to the Gentiles.** The first 11 chapters of Acts are built around the activity of the apostle Peter. When the Holy Spirit visited the church in Samaria, the apostles sent Peter and John to verify its authenticity (Acts 8:14-25). But this event was only a prelude to the one event that concluded Peter’s story in the New Testament: the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10; 11). It demonstrates the triumph of God’s grace to bring about change in stubborn hearts and the hardened social customs of Jewish believers.

**Following the death of James,** the brother of John, and Peter’s miraculous release from prison (Acts 12), Peter drops out of the narrative of Acts. Luke reports that he “went into another place” (verse 17). We know, however, that Peter did not drop out of active service in the early church. History has it that Peter died in Rome by crucifixion.—Adapted from Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright ©1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

**QUESTIONS:**

What do you think were Peter’s greatest strengths as a follower of Christ? (Give examples.)

What do you think were his greatest weaknesses? (Give examples.)

How do you see Jesus dealing with Peter in these scenarios?

If Peter’s walk with Jesus is described as a roller-coaster ride, plot the stories on the roller-coaster track, noting the ups in Peter’s life and the downs as well.

How can this be encouraging for struggling believers today?
Sabbath
FOR STUDY

» Memory Text: "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD, 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool' " (Isaiah 1:18, NJKV).

» Our Beliefs, no. 9, The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ: "In Christ’s life of perfect obedience to God’s will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life, and the whole creation may better understand the infinite and holy love of the Creator."

» Ellen G. White, Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, pp. 13-15

THE IMPORTANCE OF BUT

Waterskiing doesn’t look very complicated, especially for someone who considers himself to be athletic. How hard can it be? the young man thought to himself as the group of girls asked him if he knew how to water-ski and whether he would like to go.

"Sounds great," he said, pretending to know all about the experience. He had never been on skis, but he avoided sharing that information and replaced it with "I can do it." He had only himself to blame for what happened. After minutes of wriggling in the water he finally got the skis on, bent his knees, arms straight, and nodded his head. Sure enough, straight up on the skis he went, and he was skiing—first time. It was easy.

After about six seconds of glory and admiration from the girls in the boat, both skis flipped off, and he fell but failed to let go of the rope. After being dragged behind the boat for five minutes (while everyone yelled, “Let go of the rope!”), he finally let go. As he waited in the water, sputtering and gagging, for the boat to turn and come pick him up, he thought he might actually drown. There were no words for his humiliation.

He thought that he knew enough—that the fact that he was athletic would be sufficient. So did Peter. He was an expert fisherman (Luke 5). He knew there were no fish available for business in the afternoon. All wisdom and experience shouted, "Don’t do it. People are going to think you are crazy."

The biggest three-letter word in the world is but. It is a watershed word. It is the continental divide separating ideas. But shows an unanticipated change of direction. Peter’s words to Jesus are the watershed moment of submission.

"Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets" (verse 5, NIV).

"But because you say so" will always be a watershed phrase in the spiritual journey.
Sunday
RESPONDING

» Read 1 Corinthians 16:13, 14.

» Gina watched her younger brother Craig make mistake after mistake. One weekend it was driving after being grounded. Another time it was staying out past curfew. So many promises and telling her that he was trying to get his act together, all fell flat as soon as they left his lips. She paid for him to go to college, but he dropped out, wasting a whole semester’s tuition that she had paid for. The list went on.

» But he seems so sincere. He seems to want to get his life in order. He is a good example of the spirit being willing but the flesh being weak. How do you help restore someone like Gina’s brother Craig? How can Gina be helpful? What encouragement or advice would you give her while she is so frustrated with her little brother?

Monday
BIBLE ANSWERS ON THE LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

» Read Isaiah 53; John 3:16; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:10.

» Make no mistake, God loved us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to take our place in payment for our sins. And because He willingly did this, we are forgiven and have the opportunity to be use by Him to lead others to God. What joy! What a privilege!

» What areas of your life do you need to turn over to Christ?

Unscramble the words in the word bank and then use them to fill in the blanks.

srodassabma  gnidaelp  ssensuoethgr
ngilicnocer  dettimnoc  noitalicnocer
sessapsert  erolpmi  delicnocer
gnitupmi

“That is, that God was in Christ ___________ the world to Himself, not ___________ their ___________ to them, and has ___________ to us the word of ___________. Now then, we are ___________ for Christ, as though God were ___________ through us: we ___________ you on Christ’s behalf, be ___________ to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the ___________ of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:19-21, NKJV).

Tuesday
REFLECTING


» If the apostle Peter was consistent about anything, it was being able to step into trouble, either with his words or with his actions. Let’s review. Peter was called by the sea. And even with all he knew about fishing, he learned a humbling lesson about the power Christ had to overcome the impossible and fill fishing nets to overflowing during the day! The experience drove him to his knees.

» When he thought he would impress Jesus with his understanding of forgiveness, he proposed that maybe we should forgive people up to seven times. But, Jesus said, “No, seventy times seven!” Jesus invited him do the math. What about when Peter reacted to Jesus’ words about having to go to Jerusalem and die? He forbade Jesus to talk like that. Do you remember what Jesus said? “Get
behind me, Satan.” Those words must have done more than puncture his pride—he must have been devastated.

» When Peter boldly claimed that Jesus was the Messiah when no one else would, Jesus promised to build His church on the testimony of people like Peter who bravely confessed Jesus as Lord. But the roller coaster came crashing down when Peter promised never to deny Jesus and then repeatedly broke the promise that very night. The experience brought so much anguish that many would never have returned to face Jesus again. But Peter, full of shame and regret, remained close to Jesus. And Jesus remained close to him. Peter grew over time, and so can we. If Peter’s life teaches us anything, it challenges us to be brave and willing to take risks. He also teaches us to cling to Christ in our failures. Can you imagine the kind of stories Peter is going to tell in heaven?

**Wednesday**

**BIBLE INSIGHTS**

» Fill in the blanks.

1. "So Peter was kept in ______, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him” (Acts 12:5, NIV).

2. "Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now ______ how true it is that ______ does not show favoritism ______ from every ______ the one who fears him and does what is ______’,” (Acts 10:34,35, NIV).

3. "When they saw the ______ of ______ and ______ and realized that they were ______, ordinary men, they were ______, and they took note that these ______ had been with ______ (Acts 4:13, NIV).

4. "Be on your ______; stand firm in the ______; be ______; be strong. Do everything in ______” (1 Corinthians 16:13, 14, NIV).

5. “Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly ______, fix your ______ on ______, whom we ______ as our ______ and ______ ______” (Hebrews 3:1-6, NIV).

6. “Then Peter said, ‘______and ______ I do not have, but ______ I do have ______ you. In the name of ______ ______ of ____________, walk’” (Acts 3:6, NIV).

**Thursday**

**CONNECTING**

» Read 2 Peter 1:9; Hebrews 8:12; Isaiah 1:18; Psalm 103:12.

» Review the memory text.

» Peter’s journey reminds us that God’s love and grace is bigger than our worst failures. Some look at their lives and wonder if they are growing at all. Be mindful of the words Peter penned later in life, just before his own death. He told church members to throw themselves into doing great things for God. If they fail and feel like they don’t have what it takes, he says these words: “But whoever does not have them [faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love in ever-increasing measure], is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins” (2 Peter 1:9, NIV).

» Peter marks the problem. If you don’t keep reminding yourself that your sins are swallowed up in Christ’s death on Calvary, then there is no clear way to see hope. Maybe today it’s time to remind yourself what Jesus has been trying to say for centuries: “I . . . will remember their sins no more” (Hebrews 8:12, NIV) or “Though your sins are like scar-
let, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18, NIV) or “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12, NIV). Peter mastered the art of finding mercy in Christ, and that bolstered one of the bravest men on earth. What will God’s grace do for you?

**Friday**

**APPLYING**

» Read Luke 5:5.

» Everyone faces challenges in life. We have decisions to make that are unpopular or uncomfortable. Some of those decisions will require a tremendous amount of courage. But Peter counted the costs. He said, “We have worked hard all night long and have not caught a thing. But if you tell me to, I will let the nets down” (Luke 5:5, CEV). Think of three areas of your life in which you need to let the nets down. Clearly state the problem or scenario, and on the other side of the word *but*, write what you think God would have you do.

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