



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Like a Rock! The Life of Peter

FOLLOW ME:

THE STORY OF DISCIPLESHIP

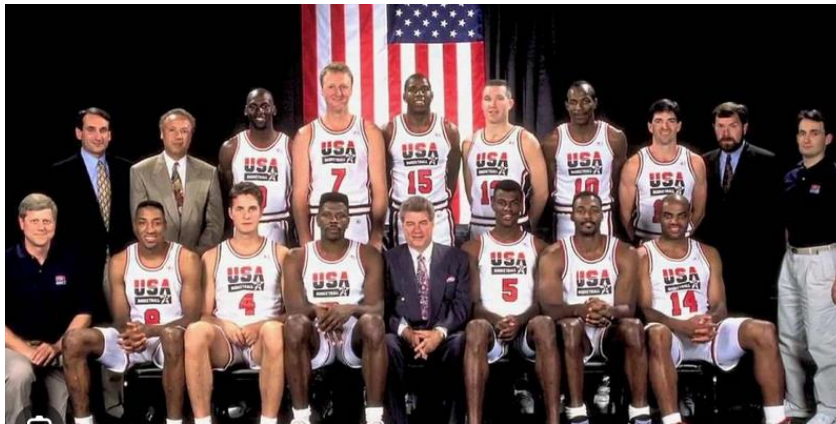
Tim Badal | June 4, 2023

In 1992, a man by the name of Jerry Colangelo, an incredibly wealthy businessman from Arizona, and the owner of a couple sports franchises, was given the task of taking over USA Basketball, which is different than NBA Basketball. USA Basketball is the official Olympic basketball association that puts together the team that will represent the United States in what was the upcoming 1992 Olympics.

Jerry Colangelo was tired of watching the Americans lose badly. Here we are, a super power; the nation that invented the game of basketball. But as we went out on the world stage, we repeatedly lost and lost badly. Jerry Colangelo said this: "The reason is because we're playing the world's best without playing our best."

He did something nobody ever thought was possible—he talked the NBA into waiving their players' inability to enter into Olympic play. In the days before the 1992 Olympics, he did something sports fans will never forget. He formed the team we know as the "Dream Team." This team was made up of 12 individuals, 11 of whom are now Hall of Famers. Many believe it was the best sports team ever assembled.

Even some of you who are novices when it comes to basketball will know the names of some of these players. They're the "Who's



Who" of basketball: Charles Barkley, Karl Malone, David Robinson, Patrick Ewing, Scottie Pippen, Michael Jordan, Larry Bird, Magic Johnson, Chris Mullin, Clyde Drexler and John Stockton. By the way, that sole player we probably don't know was Christian Laettner, the only college basketball player on the Dream Team.

This team was so great, was so amazing, that they won against all their competitors during the 1992 Olympics by an average margin of victory of over 50 points. Their largest margin of victory was in the quarter finals of the medal round, when they beat a team by over 90 points. They decimated their opponents.

You knew about this team if you were around in 1992. I was a sophomore in high school and remember when they named the Dream Team. I said, "There is nobody who's going to come close to beating this team. This team has the pedigree; it has the resumé; it has the history of greatness. Nobody on this earth is going to be able to stop them." We knew that and it became true.

Two thousand years ago, another Dream Team was formed. Jesus called 12 men, 11 of them became future Hall of Famers. One, like the original Dream Team, we don't even want to mention. However, this Dream Team was far from anybody saying they were going to be champions. When they were put together for the very first time by Rabbi Jesus—Teacher Jesus—if you were a novice



to the Bible, didn't know any of the stories, you would have approached the Bible for the very first time and would be thinking, "This is the worst team ever assembled by anyone. "

This is the gang that can't shoot straight. This is the group of muttering imbeciles, buffoons, who have Jesus—the God-Man—right in front of them, yet they're arguing and fighting about who will be greatest in the Kingdom. They don't have a clue about what's going on spiritually. Yet even the most skeptical secular historians and devout historians will say of this original Dream Team, "No group of people have ever had such an impact on the world."

In fact, one secular historian said, "Like them or not, believe in them or not, you cannot take away the idea that these men changed the history of the world." They were unlearned, unpolished and most of them were uneducated. Yet under the tutelage and training of Jesus—living life close to Him—they were transformed.

For the next two months, we are going to go on a journey under the heading, "Follow Me." We'll be looking at each disciple individually. We'll look at what made them tick. We'll look at their personalities. We'll look at their experiences. I hope and pray that we don't just look at them, but that each week, including today, we will also look at ourselves.

So let's ask ourselves some questions:

1. Have I first and foremost obeyed Jesus' command to follow Him? If I haven't, now is the day to begin. We'll hear 12 stories of individuals who followed that command and their lives were changed.
2. If I've made that decision and accepted that calling, as a follower of Jesus Christ, how am I doing with that today?
3. Do the experiences of these first disciples help me understand my own experiences? Are they giving me examples of things I should steer clear of as I follow Christ and give Him the glory as the One Who is the anthem of my heart and the anchor of my soul?

So let's dig into the stories of these disciples. We'll focus today on Peter, but let's understand a few things about all 12 disciples. Many of us might think we know a lot about them because we've studied the Gospels, but more often our focus is on Jesus. Yes, the disciples are there, but maybe we don't know as much as we think about them. If I were to ask you to name the 12 disciples, I think most of us would struggle. We would get Peter, James and John. We might get Andrew and Thomas, then it starts getting fuzzy. We'd get the bad guy, Judas. That's six. Then it gets harder.

I want to applaud what's happening in the other part of the building right now with our kids' classes. They're being taught things that will never leave them. When I was a young boy in Sunday School class, one of my teachers taught me a song to remember the names of the disciples. Any time I have to remember them now, especially as I was preparing for this series, I found myself going back to that song. It went like this:

"There were 12 disciples Jesus called to help Him: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, his brother John, Philip, Thomas, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus" —see, you didn't even know that— "Thaddeus," Who's he? "Simon, Judas and Bartholomew." Then it closed with, "And He is calling you, He is calling you. We are His disciples, I am one—are you?"

That was my audition for the worship team. Josh keeps telling me, "You can audition 'til the cows come home. Stick to preaching." Now we heard last Sunday that he has difficulty moving this pulpit. It's not heavy at all, by the way, brother. So you can sing and play the guitar, but I can lift the pulpit, all right? Some of you are totally lost right now. Seriously, he did a great job last week.

Now this is not about an audition or so I can look super spiritual. We may not know their names, but what we want to know is how Jesus transformed these guys. If I can see how Jesus does this transforming work in ordinary people, then I'll start seeing Jesus' transforming work in me. That's what I want. I want us to see ourselves in these disciples. But in this process, we'll run into two extremes.

## **We can exalt the disciples to a super-human place.**

The first approach we can take when we look at the disciples is that we'll exalt them to a super human place. Let's face it. These guys walked with Jesus. They talked with Jesus. As they learned from Jesus, they were able to heal people. They exorcised demons. They stood in front of large groups and preached. They were willing to be martyred for their faith. These guys were the Mt. Rushmore of Christians.

What we can easily do is view them as saints. That isn't inherently wrong. The word 'saint' means someone who is separated, called out. So the Bible tells us we're all saints. But when we put "Saint" in front of their names, we begin to elevate them. The Bible even calls them the pillars of the church. We can then conclude that they're something out of this world, so exalt them to a place they don't want to be.

One writer put it this way:

If you've ever visited the great cathedrals in Europe, you might assume the apostles were larger than life stained-glass saints, with shining haloes, who represented an exalted degree of spirituality. It's a shame they've so often been put on pedestals as magnificent marble figures, or portrayed in paintings like some kind of Roman gods. That dehumanizes them. They were just twelve completely ordinary men, perfectly human in every way. We mustn't lose touch with who they really were.

Maybe some of you are elevating these individuals to a place you shouldn't, then you think you could never do the things they did, never accomplish the things they accomplished, because they're out of this world and you're of this world.

## **We can eviscerate the disciples.**

The second extreme you can have—and some people do this when they see the exaltation of all these great saints—is to eviscerate them. In other words, we harshly criticize them. We look at their lives and think, "Man, these guys walked with Jesus. He did all these amazing things. Yet when the going got tough, they ran. They failed." We point out their weaknesses and use their strengths against them. Skeptics often do this.

John Lennon was once asked about Jesus and he responded, "Jesus was all right, but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It's them twisting it that ruins it for me." Then we might say, "Yeah, we really like Jesus, but the disciples got it all wrong. They messed things up." Some of us might not read this with the skeptical eyes of John Lennon, but even as Christians we might go that direction. Especially we can look at Peter or Thomas, then think, "How could that man say that? How could he do that? They saw Jesus do so many awesome things. They heard Him preach. Had I been there, I would have believed. Had I been there, I would proclaim Him. I would step out in faith. What was their problem? Why were they missing it?"

Now the Bible gives us the ability to merge these two extremes into a very realistic middle ground. Here's what another author wrote:

It's significant that the Scripture doesn't cover their defects. The point is not to portray them as super holy luminaries, nor to elevate them above mere mortals. If that were the aim, there would be no reason to record their character flaws. But instead of whitewashing the blemishes, Scripture seems to make a great deal of their human weaknesses. It's a brilliant reminder that our faith should not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Here we have a balanced approach. So what are we to do with the disciples?

## **We should examine, evaluate and emulate the disciples.**

We are to use the disciples as powerful examples for us to examine, evaluate and emulate. This is really important. The Bible tells us that the stories in Scriptures should serve as examples for us. All we'll see in the Gospels and in the other New Testament books about these men should give us important models. There is something really great in each of these men that we can emulate.

Before we exalt them to a place of deity, we need to ask, "What things are good about them and what things should we stay away from?" This is why an examination is needed. We too, as followers of Jesus Christ, also need to be examining our own lives. Even when we get into the life of Judas, there are some examples we can emulate by doing the opposite. We can learn from their mistakes and can see the good they did. These things can be useful in our lives.

Max Lucado says it this way:

We need to remember that the first disciples were ordinary men called to an extraordinary mission. Their devotion to Jesus outweighed their fears and insecurities. As a result, God changed them and used them to accomplish some mind-boggling things. Why couldn't, why wouldn't God do the same in your life?

That's where we want to go in this series. Could it be that God wants to do these things in us? Could He be asking us to follow Him in a deeper way, starting today?

There are a couple more things to add to the disciples' biographies. There were 12 of them, of course. They were called "disciples," to which we would say, "Of course, Jesus had disciples." Some of you might say, "That sounds like a gang." So what is a disciple? In the Greek, the word literally means a learner, a student. These were students who followed their Master, their Teacher, their Rabbi Jesus. The idea of learning didn't just mean learning information, but actually working to imitate the way of life of the teacher. Being a follower of Jesus Christ, being a believer, being a disciple of Jesus today, isn't so we can recite the names of His disciples or have other biblical information and knowledge. Rather, it's so you are a person whose desire and purpose is to follow the way of life that Jesus modeled. You live like He lived. You love like He loved. You act like He acted. You think like He thought.

We'll see that the 12 disciples are always broken up into three groups of four. This speaks of the place each group held in the Bible.

The first group was Peter, James, John and Andrew. They were the most prominent. This also speaks of their proximity to Jesus. They were His closest associates. That doesn't mean Jesus didn't love all of them; He just had a different level of earthly relationship with the other three groups.

The next thing we see is that they were varied groups. Some were fishermen. Others worked for the government. Others wanted to destroy the government. I mean, think about it. This was a motley crew of men.

We also know the one similarity they had, outside of all being men, was that all of them said yes to the call of Jesus. This then was a microcosm of the church. We come from all different kinds of backgrounds, with different viewpoints and ideas on a lot of peripheral things. But where we come together is that we have all said yes to Jesus. We all want to follow Him.

This now brings us to Peter. His is the name that's always listed first. Many believe the Bible indicates that Peter was the leader of the 12, the captain of this team. Yes, Jesus was the coach, teacher and master—of course He was also Savior and Lord—but when it came to who the group looked to among themselves as mere mortals, it was Peter.

We'll be going to a number of places in the Bible as we look at the life of Peter. Matthew 4:18-20 tells us Peter was called by Jesus and that he learned about Jesus from his brother Andrew. That's when he immediately left everything he had to follow Jesus. There was something Peter saw in Jesus that attracted him to this ministry.

What do we know about him? We don't know much about his life before he met Jesus. We do know he was married. We read in Mark 1:30-31 that one of the first miracles Jesus did was the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. If you have a mother-in-law, you have a wife. Now we don't know her name.

We also see in 1 Corinthians 9:5 that Paul says all the disciples were out doing the work of the Lord and that many of these men took their wives on the journey as well. One of the names he mentions specifically is Peter. No doubt his wife was a believer and a follower of Jesus Christ in her own right. We don't know if they had any children; there's not any mention of them, but that doesn't mean they didn't.

We also know Peter was probably similar in age to Jesus. Some scholars believe Peter may have been a little older than Jesus, but still a peer of Jesus. That would make him in his late 20s or early 30s. As we study these guys, remember they were young men. I'm 47 and it's easy for me to say, "Why weren't they more mature, more experienced? Why didn't they have more wisdom?" They were young men and were working through how to understand the world and life.

We know Peter came from a place near the Sea of Galilee, a town named Capernaum. It was a fishing community. He worked with his three associates: his brother Andrew and their friends, the brothers James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Either they were in business together or they were just close hometown friends. They made up Jesus' closest circle of associates.

With all that said—fisherman, Capernaum, married—what do we need to know about Peter's first encounter with Jesus? In that first meeting, Jesus did something really important and I don't think many of us as Bible students even think about this. One of the first things that happened when they first met is kind of odd. I should point out that he wasn't even Peter at this point; he was Simon of Capernaum. That was his birth name. When Simon approached Jesus, one of the first things Jesus said was, "You're no longer Simon. I have a new name for you. Peter—*petros*, rock, stone. That's what I will make you." Nicknames have a way of helping people understand who we are or what we're about.

When I was in high school, I had gotten kicked out of a class. As that was happening, one of my friends—who was next in line to get kicked out of that class—said, “Hey, Badal! Good luck in the principal’s office.” He was yelling this as I was leaving the classroom. “Badal! Bad-al. B-A-D A-L. You’re bad in class, you’re bad in school, you’re bad in sports. You’re Bad Al.” From that moment on, I was no longer Tim. I was Bad Al. That became my nickname. It became a moniker. The teachers said my diploma should even read “Bad Al. This is who I was. It was a name that said something.

So why does Jesus call Simon “*Petros*, Peter, Rock, Rocky”? It’s because that name tells us something about what Jesus wanted to change in Simon as He transformed him.

Maybe some of you who are my age or older remember the Chevy truck commercials with Bob Seger singing, “Like a Rock.” It became the motto for the Chevy truck line. “Buy Chevy, because your truck will be like a rock.” The commercials were all about the Chevy trucks doing all these crazy things, and Bob Seger singing, “Like a rock...” They wanted you to know that their trucks were durable, resilient. They could stand the test against any trial. I don’t know why today is a singing sermon, but that’s okay?

It’s my belief that Jesus was saying, “I’m going to take you, Simon, and make a rock out of you—a resilient, resolute, rugged, strong, durable man. The world will come against you and you will stand against it. I need that type of witness when I leave this world and you’re going to be one of my chief spokesmen. You’re going to be a rock.”

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 16. I want to show you this. This is one of the great moments of Peter’s life. He’s on top of the world and this is where he nails it. Let’s start in verse 13 and see a play on words. Maybe you’ve read this Scripture before, but you’ve never really seen it.

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” <sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

So this is the working consensus of the crowd. Then Jesus turns to the disciples and says, “*But who do you say that I am?*” Notice what Matthew does. He gives us both names of the guy we’re looking at today: Simon Peter. He doesn’t want us to wonder what’s happening here, so he identifies him with both names. “*Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!’ Jesus calls him, ‘Simon, son of Jonah.’ Simon, the name his dad gave him. ‘For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter.’*”

Jesus says, “You’re the rock.” I believe Jesus is saying, “Peter, before this proclamation you were just like every other man. But when you made a decision to proclaim that I am the Christ, the son of the living God, everything changed. Your name changed and you became the rock that I want to transform you into being.”

Remember, we don’t exalt these guys as something different. This is what Jesus wants to do in every one of us. He wants to take Bad Al and turn him into a pastor. He wants to take you, a sinner—and me, a sinner—and turn us into saints. He wants to take the blind and give us sight. He wants to change the very fabric of who we are, to put the old be in the past and then the new will come. When we follow Jesus, everything changes. Here Simon is reminded, “That’s what I was; this is what I am now because of Jesus.” Can you say that this morning? “I have been so transformed by Jesus that everything has changed.”

So what do we need to know about Peter?

## **We need to appreciate the passion.**

Peter is a passionate individual. He’s a man of action. He’s not afraid to talk. He’s loud. He can be obnoxious. He’s not afraid of what anyone thinks about him. I don’t know who you think might be like him, but he’s my kind of guy. This guy is a ready-fire-aim guy. He’s willing to stand in the gap. He’s a passionate man. This passion caused him to be impulsive and impetuous. God used this impetuous, impulsive, passionate man to be a leader. Why?

### **He was inquisitive.**

Peter asked Jesus more questions about the Christian life than all the other disciples combined. I think this is a truth we need to embrace. We’re like the 11. “Okay, I don’t understand what Jesus is saying, but I have a child-like faith and I’ll leave it there.” No. Peter shows us that we need to dig into stuff. This is our eternity at stake. This is our Savior. This is our hope in this world. Maybe we should understand a little more how this operates. Peter showed us that questions were good for him; I think they’re good for us as well.

## He took the initiative.

Like your pastor, Peter often didn't wait for permission, he just asked for forgiveness. Maybe that's you as well. He acted. We need people who will act.

Now, I'm speaking to those of you who are more introverted. We'll come to other disciples who are more like you, and that's when we'll have something to say to the extroverts. But for now, let's see what the extroverts have to teach the rest of us. We are far too passive in our faith. Peter takes the initiative. When Jesus was walking on the water and the disciples were in the boat, Peter was the one who asked, "Can I come out there with You? Just say it and I'll come." He stepped out on the water. He walked on water.

Could it be that some of us are not experiencing the great things God wants for us because in our timidity and passivity, we are unlike Peter who took the initiative and instead are just dipping our toes in the water? We're probably thinking, "This is too difficult. I can't do it."

Of course, initiative can be a double-edged sword. When Jesus was arrested, Peter pulled out his sword and cut off the ear of one of the Roman soldiers. That time Jesus rebuked him. Initiative can be impulsive and isn't always appropriate. So we must be careful, but many of us need more initiative than we have.

## He was involved and invested.

Finally, Peter was involved, or you can use the word invested. Other than one episode, every Scripture that speaks of Peter has him connected either to Jesus or to the other disciples. He was connected in his comings and goings. I could preach a whole sermon on this. As followers of Jesus Christ, every episode of our lives should be connected to Jesus and the other followers of Jesus.

Can I just ask one thing? In the summer, when we as followers of Jesus in America say we don't have to take our faith in Jesus as seriously, when other things can crowd our calendars, is Jesus and His other followers your first priority in life? Before you start taking things off the table, ask yourself, "Am I going to be invested in this like Peter is?"

The only time we don't see Peter involved and invested with Jesus or His people is when he denied Jesus. I think there's a greater chance we'll fall into temptation and sin when we're apart from Jesus and His people, than when we're with them. It's not a guarantee, but I think the probability is higher. Peter learned that and in his two letters to the church—1 and 2 Peter—he told them not to give up that fellowship.

## We need to avoid the pitfalls.

Turn to John 18. If you've been here for any amount of time, you're thinking, "We were just in John." I preached John 18 a year ago next week under the heading, "Epic Fail." I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this now, but I want you to know that Peter's fall from grace—his denial of Jesus on the night He was betrayed—came because of three things—three things we need to avoid.

### He delighted in his own greatness.

Jesus told all the disciples, "You are all going to leave Me. You'll all desert Me." Nobody says anything except Peter. He takes the initiative and says, "They all may leave You, Jesus, but I won't. I'm with you. I'm better than they are. I'm wiser and holier than they are. I'm going to stay the course."

Some of us are delighting in our own greatness too much. Avoid that. Pride comes before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). Peter is arrogant; some of us are arrogant in our faith.

### He dismissed the warnings.

Peter is even taken aside by Jesus Who says, "Listen, Satan is going to sift you like wheat. He's going to tempt you." Instead of listening to this warning, the second thing Peter did was dismiss the warnings. We also need to be careful to avoid the warnings. Instead, he was haughty. The warning was given to him. "Be careful; temptation is out there."

## He desired his comfort more than his calling.

Peter dismissed the warning, then the moment of testing came, he desired his own comfort more than he desired his calling. How many of us have deserted or denied Jesus for the sake of comfort over calling? That's what Peter did. Peter delighted in his own greatness and dismissed the warnings of Jesus.

In fact, Peter thought he was so great that we read in Matthew 16:23 that Peter rebuked Jesus. My goodness, it takes a bold man to rebuke the King of kings and the Lord of lords. But how many of us have done just that? Maybe not in our words, but we've done it in our actions. We've thought, "God, You don't know what's best for me, but I do. You don't know what I need, but I do. I'm going to go my own way."

So there are things to appreciate about Peter, but there are definitely things to avoid. Let's remember, at the end of the Gospel of John, Peter is a shell of his former self. He had come so far, yet he had failed so miserably, that by John 19 he was wondering if God would ever be able to use him again.

Some of you may have gone the way of Peter, where you started out really well. There were some great changes happening. You had some victories along the way. Then an epic failure came and now you're filled with shame and guilt. You're wondering, "Will I ever be back there again?"

I will remind you of what John 20 and 21 says. Jesus went and found Peter, then He restored Peter by forgiving his sin. That same Jesus wants to forgive all the modern-day Peters. He wants to send you out as new people. As we'll see as we read the New Testament—from the day of Pentecost in the book of Acts to the letters Peter wrote—he ran the race, he fought the good fight, and he finished well.

## We need to assess our pathway.

As we close this service, we come to communion, a time of remembering. But for Peter, his memory was focused on the day he blew it, the day he failed. These disciples are examples we are to examine and emulate, so as we approach communion, we need to assess our pathway. How's our walk?

I want to mention three aspects of Peter's life for us to consider.

### Am I more talk than walk?

As you examine your heart, as the Bible tells us to do before communion, ask yourself, "Am I, like Peter, more talk than walk? Do I talk a bigger game than I live out? Do I talk well about my Christian faith when Christians are around, but when I'm with ungodly people, I do ungodly things?" Communion is an opportunity for us to seek forgiveness and for Jesus to give us that new name and new opportunity.

### Am I willing to be bold and step out of the boat?

Maybe there's something that Jesus, by His Spirit, has been calling you to do, but like the other disciples in the boat, you're unwilling to take that bold step. You're unwilling to go where Jesus is. You think, "This is too hard. He's asking too much of me." Maybe during this time of reflection, you and I will be willing to step out of the boat and step out in faith.

### Am I willing to move beyond my failures to pursue faithfulness?

Peter is an example of an epic failure whom Christ forgave and changed. In that second chance, Peter used it to glorify God. As we are forgiven, as we are renewed, this time of communion is the opportunity to commit to a new day of faithfulness and give God the glory that's due His name.

So as the worship team plays, would you for a couple moments go to the Lord? Maybe ask yourself one of these three questions. Seek forgiveness where it's needed, pursue commitment where it may be needed, and ask the Lord by His Spirit to change and transform you.