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how to use the *uncommon* group bible studies

Each *Uncommon* group Bible study contains 12 sessions, which are divided into 3 stand-alone units of 4 sessions each. You may choose to teach all 12 sessions consecutively, to use just one unit, or to present individual sessions. You know your group, so do what works best for you and your students.

This is your leader's guidebook for teaching your group. Electronic files (in PDF format) of each session's student handouts are available for download at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/ The handouts include the "message," "dig," "apply," "reflect" and "meditation" sections of each study and have been formatted for easy printing. You may print as many copies as you need for your group.

Each session opens with a devotional meditation written for you, the youth leader. As hectic and trying as youth work is much of the time, it's important never to neglect your interior life. Use the devotions to refocus your heart and prepare yourself to share with kids the message that has already taken root in you. Each of the 12 sessions are divided into the following sections:

starter

Young people will stay in your youth group if they feel comfortable and make friends in the group. This section is designed for you and the students to get to know each other better.

message

The message section will introduce the Scripture reading for the session and get students thinking about how the passage applies to their lives.

dig

Many young people are biblically illiterate. In this section, students will dig into the Word of God and will begin to interact on a personal level with the concepts.

apply

Young people need the opportunity to think through the issues at hand. This section will get students talking about the passage of Scripture and interacting on important issues.

reflect

The conclusion to the study will allow students to reflect on some of the issues presented in the study on a more personal level.

meditation

A closing Scripture for the students to read and reflect on.



unit I

heroes of the new testament

Everyone needs a hero. Yet as we look around our world today, where are the heroes? Are they on television, in the movies, on the Internet? What does it take to be a hero? In a lost and searching world, our students need to see and meet more real-life heroes.

As I look in the Scriptures, I keep feeling myself drawn to the heroes. The pages of the Scriptures are filled with them: heroes who stood for what was right, heroes who stood for what was godly, heroes who had an intense love for God. These individuals, such as Peter, Paul, Timothy, Mary and scores of others, all have one thing in common: They were not heroes because they were giants of the faith, or because they were perfect, or because they had it all together. What made them heroes was that they were real and their love for God was real. They were real-life people with real-life struggles, yet they had an extraordinary love for God. Our students need to see that heroes are real people with real problems but who have an incredible love for God.

In addition to the heroes of the Bible, there stand other heroes. These individuals will never be in the pages of the Scriptures, yet I believe they are heroes in the eyes of the One who matters most. I believe that one of those heroes is you. Your students may never tell you this, but believe me, you are a hero. So to all of you who are real with students, who love them unconditionally, who choose to be transparent with your life, who love God and are willing to share that love relationship with young people: you are today's hero. When the time comes to be with Him in heaven, if any hero will get the applause of the saints and angels, I believe it will be you.

You are a hero in your work for His kingdom.



session 1

**peter: failure is
never final**

“Lord, if it is you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

MATTHEW 14:28-29

Jesus’ schedule for the day would be familiar to youth workers. After teaching all day, He proceeded to feed His hungry flock and send them home. He dismissed the disciples before He retreated to be alone with God. Personally, I would have opted for a nap or a nice quiet walk along the shore of the Galilean Sea. Instead, Jesus chose to be with the Father. Such a picture portrays the nature of Jesus Christ and unveils His motive for His mission on earth.

In the meantime, the disciples found themselves in rough waters. By the time Jesus cruised onto the scene, the fishermen feared the elements, the political zealots wished they were lobbying on dry land, and the others wanted to be anywhere else—even if it meant collecting taxes.

Jesus immediately noticed the fear of His men. He said, “Take courage. It is I. Don’t be afraid” (Matthew 14:27). God will reveal Himself when we’re afraid. When we face fear, frustration or futility, we need to replace our discouragement—our “dis-courage”—with the courage offered by Christ.

Peter tried to do just that. He got out of the boat and began walking on the water toward Jesus. But fast-forward a few frames in the story, and we find that Peter’s courage is fleeting. He doubts. He sinks. He fails. Do you ever feel more fear than faith and more waves than wonder? Does your work with people often seem to be blown away by the wind? If so, learn from our friend Peter. Although he fears and doubts at times, Jesus labeled him “The Rock” (or “Rocky” if he were alive today).

When you find yourself in the lifeboat buffeted by the elements, follow Peter’s lead. First, pray to Jesus: “Tell me to come to you.” Second, listen (and wait!) for God’s invitation: “Come.” Don’t jump overboard with your own best intentions—sometimes failure can be the result of your premature departure. Third, leave behind everything you know and trust—your confidence in your career, the comfort of the boat, the company of your friends—and go to Christ. Finally, get out and walk with Jesus, keeping your eyes on Him.

When Peter took the step of faith but then took his eyes off Jesus, he started to sink. He nearly drowned. He failed. Then he found himself face to face with the living God, who admonished him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” Peter’s failure led him to a deeper faith and a powerful future. With Peter and the rest of us, failure is never final. Bon voyage!

Courage is resistance to fear and mastery of fear, not absence of it.

MARK TWAIN



group study guide

peter: failure is never final

starter

FAILURE IS NEVER FINAL: The pages of history are filled with people who were once failures, but they are now legends. The difference between those who have led lives of excellence and those who have led lives of mediocrity lies in their willingness to fail and learn from their failures. Failure is not final; it's an opportunity to grow, learn and be used by God. Here's a look at two such people. Have a different student read each of the following portraits, and then discuss the questions as a whole group.

Portrait One: In 1978, while vacuuming his home, James Dyson realized his bag vacuum cleaner was constantly losing suction power. Dust was quickly clogging the pores

Note: You can download this group study guide in 8½" x 11" format at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/the_new_testament.zip.

of the bag and blocking the airflow so that the suction dropped rapidly. So Dyson set to work solving this problem. Five years and 5,127 prototypes later, the world's first cyclonic bagless vacuum cleaner arrived.

Dyson offered his invention to major manufacturers, but one by one they turned him down. So Dyson decided to manufacture his own vacuum cleaner. Today, with his research team, he has developed products that have achieved sales of more than \$10 billion worldwide. He has used a substantial amount of this money to open the Dyson Microarray Laboratory at the Royal Marsden Hospital in London. This state-of-the-art facility helps scientists study thousands of genes at a time, identifying patterns relevant to breast cancer, its treatment and possible cure.

Although people could easily survive without Dyson's bagless vacuum cleaners, his ultimate success (after more than 5,000 prototypes) allowed Dyson to facilitate research that may eventually save millions of lives.

Portrait Two: In all the pages of history, there are few people who have failed as much as Thomas Edison. For years, Edison tried in vain to accomplish something that many said could never be done: create the light bulb! Edison made more than 900 attempts to create a light bulb before finally achieving success. More than 900 times, Edison developed a bulb only to fail and go back to the drawing board to try again. Yet in the middle of all the failure, Edison kept trying. According to Edison, every time he experienced failure he merely "found out one more way not to make a light bulb." He did not let failure become the final word for him. Eventually he did succeed, and he has since

gone down in the pages of history as one of the greatest inventors of all time.

1. What would have happened if James Dyson and Thomas Edison had let failure become the final word in their lives?

2. In your opinion, what was it that kept James Dyson and Thomas Edison from giving up after they had failed so many times?

3. Why is it so easy to let failure get the best of us?

4. What are some ways to turn defeats into victories?

message

Failure is the classroom of life. Even within the pages of God's Word, failures can be seen as instruments that God used to mold and change lives. Peter is perhaps the greatest example in the New Testament of what we would consider a failure, yet God saw past his shortcomings to the potential that was within him.

Let's look at some of the important events that occurred in the life of Peter after he met Christ. In John 1:40-42 we find the story of how Jesus first called Peter and his brother, Andrew, to follow Him. As you read this passage, think about the significance of Jesus giving Peter, who was then called Simon, a new name.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter) (John 1:40-42).

1. Why do you think Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter?

2. What significance is there in Peter's name meaning "rock"?

3. How does it feel to know that God sees past our failures to our potential?

When Jesus first met Peter, he was an ordinary fisherman who was often brash and impulsive. After Christ entered his life, Peter didn't suddenly become perfect or stop stumbling. However, he did become a changed person with new goals and new priorities. Jesus chose Peter because he was a real person who could be changed by God's love. Often, this change came about as Peter experienced failure and received Christ's forgiveness.

Perhaps the greatest example of this occurred near the end of Jesus' time on earth. Jesus knew that He would soon be crucified, and told the disciples, "You will all fall away . . . for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee" (Mark 14:27-28). Peter, with the best of intentions, insisted that he would never turn away from Jesus:

Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not."

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same (Mark 14:29-31).

Skipping ahead a few verses, Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and is taken away to stand trial. Peter follows the

procession and finds himself standing outside the courtyard where Jesus has been taken. When he is approached by a servant girl who recognizes him as a follower of Christ, we see how Peter's emphatic insistence that he would never deny Jesus plays out:

They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together. Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire. . . . While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him.

"You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said.

But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.

When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."

He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept (Mark 14:53,66-72).

1. Why do think Peter was so confident that he would never deny Jesus?

2. Was there ever a time in your life when you felt that way? Explain.

3. What two mistakes did Peter make before he denied Jesus (see Mark 14:30,38)?

4. God knows our weaknesses. Is that a comfort or a burden to you? Why?

dig

Peter denied Christ three times, just as Jesus said he would. But that was not the end of the story for Peter. After Jesus was laid to rest in the tomb on a Friday, early the next Sunday morning, three women (named Mary, Salome and Mary Magdalene) went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with spices (which was the custom of the time). When they entered the tomb, instead of finding the body of Jesus, they encountered a man wearing a white robe. The man said to them:

Don't be alarmed. . . . You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go; tell his disciples and Peter, "He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you" (Mark 16:6-7).

1. What was the significance of the angel's words "and Peter"?

2. How do you think Peter felt when he heard that the angel had said this?

The book of Luke tells us that when Peter heard what the women said, he "got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened" (Luke 24:12). Peter was trying to make sense of it all.

Later, the resurrected Jesus appeared to seven of the disciples, including Peter, by the Sea of Tiberias. The men had been fishing all night, but had nothing to show for it. Suddenly, a man called to them from the shore about 100 yards from the boat and instructed them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. They

did so and caught so many fish that they couldn't even pull up the net. When Peter realized the man instructing them from the shore was Jesus, he jumped into the water and swam to Him. Once the other six disciples reached the shore, Jesus shared breakfast with them. John 21:15-19 tells the conclusion of the story:

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." 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. I tell you the truth, 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." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

1. If you were Peter, how would you have felt standing before Jesus as He asked you, "Do you love me"?

2. How would you have felt standing before Christ as He restored you and said, “Follow Me”?

3. Why do you think Peter jumped into the water and swam to shore when he realized it was Jesus?

4. Why did Jesus ask Peter three times if he loved Him? What purpose did Jesus have in restoring Peter into a right relationship with Him in front of the other disciples?

5. How does it make you feel to know that God sees beyond your failures and can forgive and restore you? Explain.

During Jesus' ministry, Peter had been a bit of an unstable leader with a defiant swagger. Christ had now forgiven him and restored him. When Jesus was preparing to leave the earth after His resurrection, He told the disciples, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. . . . You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:4,8).

Peter and the disciples followed what Jesus had said and waited in an upper room in Jerusalem. Then, on the Day of Pentecost, a sound like the rushing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages. When the crowd heard them, some thought that the believers were drunk. In response, Peter, through the power of the Holy Spirit, stood up and began to address the people.

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. . . . Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and

your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (Acts 2:22-24,36-41).

1. How did God use Peter?

2. What were the results of Peter’s obedience?

3. Even though Peter felt like a failure, God used him as a part of His plan to touch lives. What hope can be found for you personally from these verses in Acts?

God went on to use Peter in many miraculous ways. He was beaten and thrown in prison on several occasions, but he never again denied that he knew Christ or tried to distance himself from the

Lord. Peter became one of the main leaders in the Early Church—a true “rock” and foundation of the growing community, just as Jesus had said.

apply

1. Peter denied Jesus out of fear and pride. We are all like Peter because we are all guilty of denying Christ as Lord in particular areas of our lives. What is one area of your life in which you need to make Jesus the Lord?

2. As we look at Peter’s mistakes, what are two practices that you can apply to your life to help you accomplish this?

3. In what areas does God want to use you?

- 4. Are you truly willing to keep following Jesus, even when you fail? If so, how will you persevere?

- 5. Jesus changed Simon’s name to “The Rock.” If you allowed Jesus to intently look at you, to what would He change your name? Why?

reflect

- 1. How does it feel to know that . . .

God knows your potential?

God knows your weaknesses and failures?

God is in the business of restoration?

God wants to use you?

2. What are some areas of your life where failure has turned out to be an opportunity?

3. Why is it often so difficult to see past our weaknesses and failures to the potential God sees in us?

4. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul writes, “I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” How

does this passage relate to what you've learned about Peter? How does it relate to your own life?

5. How does it make you feel to know that God's power can be displayed in our weaknesses?

6. What action step will you take to apply what you have learned in this session about yourself?

meditation



And the God of all grace, who called you to eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

1 PETER 5:10