

## “MY LOVE WILL BRING YOU BACK”

“From the beginning, I have known you completely. I understand the thoughts and intents of your heart (Hebrews 4:12-13). I am acquainted with your words and your ways. I am familiar with every joy, every failure and sin (Psalm 90:8). I know your path before you take it. When you wander from Me, I will find you, I will hold you (Psalm 139:10), and I will bring you back.”

The true state of Peter’s heart was shown to him the night he denied Christ. His confidence in himself—his zealotry for Christ, his self-righteousness, and his ability to stand when others fell—all came crashing down the moment the words left his lips. Undoubtedly, the days that followed were filled with many tears, regrets, and sorrows, as Peter experienced the pain and grief that comes when the flesh is cut away.

But Jesus, who chose Peter to fill heaven’s nets, to feed His people and strengthen his brethren, would allow nothing to remain in his heart that would prevent him from fulfilling His purposes for his life. Jesus would remind Peter of his calling and his need to abide in Him to bear much fruit and glorify the Father (John 15:5, 8). Peter went on to be restored with greater passion and vigor, producing more fruit than he ever could have imagined.

### Cut Away

In the hours preceding His arrest, Jesus spoke to His disciples of the necessity of abiding in Him in order to produce fruit. In the same breath, He revealed that even fruit-bearers need pruning for greater fruitfulness. While His words may not have made sense at the time, the disciples would come to understand that *they* possessed qualities that would inhibit kingdom work.

Read John 15:1-8. What is God’s purpose in pruning? \_\_\_\_\_

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Why is pruning necessary according to 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24? \_\_\_\_\_

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Per these passages, who is responsible to accomplish this? (John 15:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:24) \_\_\_\_\_

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Throughout the Word there are many terms used to describe the cutting away of the flesh—the removal of actions, attitudes, and behaviors that are not pleasing to the Lord. Concepts such as circumcision, refining, purifying, pruning, and chastisement describe this necessary but painful process. All are done with the intent to sanctify—to conform the believer into a vessel that exhibits only Jesus.

Are there aspects of your life that fail to reflect Jesus, or may be inhibiting greater fruitfulness? If so, why have you allowed these to remain in your life? \_\_\_\_\_

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Deuteronomy 30:6 says, “*And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*” The Hebrew word used

for “*heart*” in this passage, describes the entire disposition of the inner person that God can discern.<sup>1</sup> (Also, Hebrews 4:12-13.) Are your “impediments” to greater fruitfulness inner attitudes and dispositions? If so, identify them. \_\_\_\_\_

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How can heart issues be more detrimental to one’s relationship with Christ than external behaviors?

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Why is it often necessary for God to take drastic measures to conform us into His image? (Consider Matthew 5:29-30.) \_\_\_\_\_

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Further, Webster’s Dictionary states that the purpose of chastening is to cause one to be more humble and restrained.

Peter believed he was more spiritually mature than he was, but Jesus knew his heart. Thinking back on Peter’s denial in Luke 22:54-62, do you think he believed he was capable of committing such a sin? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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What was the Lord “cutting away” in Peter so that he could bear more fruit? (See Matthew 14:28, 16:22, 17:4, 19:27, and John 13:8, 18:10 for examples.)<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

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According to Hebrews 12:5-11, what does chastening produce in those who submit to the process?

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Proverbs 3:11-12 says, “*My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.*”

### Made New

First Corinthians 15:5 reveals that Peter was the first of the eleven disciples to meet with Jesus after He had risen. Imagine yourself in Peter’s place. How might you react and what might you say as you looked into the eyes of the One you had betrayed? What might Christ have said to him if anything?

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What promise is found in Job 5:17-18? \_\_\_\_\_

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Although the Lord promises full healing and renewal, this can take time. The cutting away of Peter’s sin left him weak and weary, and vulnerable. Undoubtedly, he experienced deep grief and sorrow; he questioned his character, calling, and fitness to be Christ’s disciple.

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<sup>1</sup>Baker, Warren and Eugene Carpenter, ed. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003. H3824

<sup>2</sup> Peter was naturally impulsive, presumptuous, and self-seeking.

Describe a time when you experienced pruning such as Peter. \_\_\_\_\_

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In time, Peter's strength would be renewed, and his vigor would return, but this time he would be empowered by the Lord.

The word renew implies an extensive remaking so that what had become faded or disintegrated seems like new. The following are synonyms for *renew*, and the first step of God's restorative work. At present, which of these do you need God to accomplish in your life? Circle all that apply.

- **Restore** is the return to an original state after depletion or loss.
- **Refresh** is the supplying of something necessary to restore lost strength, animation, or power.
- **Renovate** is a renewing by cleansing, repairing or rebuilding.
- **Rejuvenation** is the restoration of youthful vigor, powers, and appearance.<sup>3</sup>

Record Jeremiah 31:3-4a— God's faithfulness to bring you back. \_\_\_\_\_

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### With Me

On the Sea of Galilee, Peter and six others toiled all night with nothing to show for their efforts. It was strangely reminiscent of the last time Peter labored all night and caught nothing.

Read John 21:1-6.

Considering John 15:5, what truth might Christ have been seeking to convey by withholding the fish from Peter's nets? \_\_\_\_\_

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Now read Luke 5:1-11. Describe Peter's predicament. Why did he initially question Christ's command to "*launch out into the deep*" (v.4)? Upon whom were his thoughts at that moment? \_\_\_\_\_

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What did Peter realize about himself, and about Jesus as he fell at His knees? (v.8-9) \_\_\_\_\_

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Who and what did Christ call him to be? (vv.10-11) \_\_\_\_\_

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Return to John 21; read verses 7-14.

How had Peter's demeanor changed since the first miraculous catch? \_\_\_\_\_

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Of what did Peter need to be reminded? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>3</sup> Merriam- Webster, Inc: *Merriam- Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Springfield., Mass., U.S.A.: Merriam- Webster, 1985, c1983

## Restored

Continue reading in John 21, verses 15-25.

What did Christ ask Peter to do in response to His love for him? (vv.15-17; review Luke 22:32.)

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Why was Peter grieved by Christ's inquiry of his love for Him? \_\_\_\_\_

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Using the Greek word *agape*, Jesus asked whether Peter *loved* Him *perfectly, sacrificially, and unconditionally*. Peter responded to His inquiry using the word, *phileo* (friendly or brotherly love). What had Peter learned about his love for Christ? \_\_\_\_\_

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Considering who Peter was to become, why was this lesson paramount? (Think on 2 Corinthians 12:9.) \_\_\_\_\_

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Why mustn't Peter be concerned with another man's calling and the consequences of his obedience? (John 21:21) \_\_\_\_\_

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Although Christ spoke of Peter's death (vv.18-19), His words are applicable to *all* who follow Him—you will be led where you do not want to go. But had Peter not been "pruned", he would not have gone on to greater fruitfulness. Although "*no chastening is joyful for the present*" (Hebrews 12:11), it is done "*for [your] profit*" by the God who desires to accomplish greater things in and through your life than you desire for yourself.

Hebrews 12:12-13 says, "*So take a new grip with your tired hands and stand firm on your shaky legs. Mark out a straight path for your feet. Then those who follow you, though they are weak and lame, will not stumble and fall but will become strong*" (NLT).

Finally, turn to Acts 2 and read verses 1-4, 14, and 36-47.

Describe the fruit that was bore in Peter's life. \_\_\_\_\_

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Again, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 says, "*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it*" (NKJV).