



Enter the Story

Peter

A narrative about how God invites all people to be a part of His kingdom and His family.

THE BIBLE

Acts 9-10, 12

Prepare for the Story

ICEBREAKER

- Share about a time when you felt left out or not part of a group. Describe what that feeling felt like and how did it affect you in the moment or in the future?

Rewind the Story

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- New Beginnings – Jesus’ Ascension & the birth of the church
- Signs & Wonders – The miracles of the Apostles
- Persecution & Growth – Steven and the church scatters
- Saul to Paul - Road to Damascus conversion.

Hear the Story

Scene One: Restoring Life

The early church continued to expand beyond Jerusalem, and Peter the apostle traveled from town-to-town teaching about God’s kingdom and the good news about Jesus the Messiah.

During his travels, he met a man who'd been paralyzed for eight years. Peter said, *"Jesus the Messiah heals you! Get up and roll up the mat you are lying on!"* The man was instantly healed! When people saw this man walking around, they were amazed and chose to follow Jesus, turning from their ways to God's ways.

In a nearby city, one of Jesus' followers, named Tabitha, became very sick and died. She was known for helping the poor and for her extraordinary kindness. Many of the people she helped gathered together to mourn.

Jesus' followers brought Peter to the house where she was being prepared for burial. As Peter entered, he asked everyone to leave the room. Then he knelt down next to her and prayed. *"Get up, Tabitha."*

Right away, she opened her eyes! She looked at Peter and sat up. Peter held out his hand and helped her stand up. Then he called all the people who were gathered to mourn for her and showed them that she was alive!

The news of this miracle spread throughout the entire town; everyone knew Tabitha's story, and many people turned their lives towards God.

Scene Two: All Are Welcome

Cornelius, a commander in the Roman army, was well respected by the Jewish people, though he wasn't a Jew or a follower of Jesus. Cornelius gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God.

One afternoon, Cornelius had a vision where an angel said, *"God has seen your kindness with the poor and wants you to meet His messenger, Peter. He's staying near the seashore in the next town."*

Right away, Cornelius sent his servants to find Peter.

Meanwhile, Peter also had a vision from God. In this vision, God showed Peter that the Gentiles, that is, everyone who was not a Jew, should be accepted as part of God's family just as much as Jews.

The next day, when Cornelius' servants brought Peter to him, Cornelius fell at Peter's feet and worshipped him. But Peter pulled him up, saying, *"Stand up. I'm human, just like you!"*

Cornelius brought Peter inside, where he'd gathered a group. Peter said to them, *"You know it is against our law for a Jew to enter the home and associate with a Gentile. But God showed me in a vision that I shouldn't think of anyone as unworthy or unclean."*

Cornelius said, *"We are listening carefully and are open to what God wants to say to us through you."*

So, Peter continued, *"It's clear to me now that God welcomes every person of every culture who chooses to do what is right. You've heard that God has sent a special messenger of peace to Israel. He is Jesus the Messiah, the king of all people. We're eyewitnesses to His miracles, teachings, death, and resurrection. But Jesus did not come just for the Jews; everyone who chooses to follow Him will find forgiveness and new life."*

Before Peter finished speaking, God's Spirit filled the people in the room, and they began speaking in other languages. Cornelius and all of his guests were baptized that day and became followers of Jesus. This was the start of Jesus' followers fully welcoming Gentiles into the church.

Scene Three: Set Free

It was about this time that Herod began arresting many of the followers of Jesus. He had James, John's brother, arrested and executed, and this pleased the Jewish religious leaders because of this, Herod also arrested Peter. While in prison, he also put Peter under heavy guard, intending to bring him out for a public trial and execution. But the church earnestly prayed for Peter.

The night before Peter was to be put on trial, he was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with chains, and more guards stood at the entrance. Then suddenly, Peter's cell filled with light! An angel stood in front of Peter and tapped him on his side to awaken him.

"Quick! Get up!" he told Peter. The chains fell off Peter's wrists. *"Put on your sandals, and let's go. Follow me!"* the angel said.

As Peter followed the angel, he wasn't sure if it was a dream or if it was really happening. Peter and the angel walked right by all the guards, completely unnoticed. When they reached the thick iron gate leading outside, it swung open on its own! As Peter escaped down a city street, the angel disappeared.

Peter ran to the house where the believers were praying and knocked on the door. When a servant heard Peter's voice, she ran excitedly to tell the others - but left the door closed!

"You're out of your mind! Maybe it's Peter's ghost!" the others doubted. But Peter kept knocking, and finally, they opened the door and let him in. The believers were stunned. They all began talking at the same time! Peter motioned for them to quiet down. Then, he told them the incredible story of how God freed him from prison and execution.

Peter encouraged them, *"Please tell the others what's happened and that I am safe."* Then, Peter fled to another city.

Scene Four: Peter's Death

Until the end of his life, Peter continued to boldly share about his encounters with Jesus. Details about the end of Peter's life are uncertain. But stories from the early church suggest that Peter was arrested and crucified like Jesus. Some accounts say that Peter felt unworthy to be killed in the same way as Jesus, so he requested to be crucified upside down.

Peter's influence on the early church echoed for generations. Many others carried on his calling to share about Jesus the Messiah wherever they went, no matter what the cost.

Retell the Story

- What happened as the early church continued to expand?
- Why kind of amazing things were happening?
- Who was Cornelius?
- What did God reveal to Peter through his dream?
- What did this mean for the early church?
- As the church continued to grow, what did Herod decide to do?

- What was his plan for Peter?
- What happened when Peter was in jail?
- How did Peter's life end?

Discuss the Story

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?
- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?
- What from this story made you wonder?
- What was Peter like? What's the first thing that comes to your mind?
- What did Peter and the apostles do that was similar to Jesus' actions?
- Why do you think Cornelius becoming a follower of Jesus was important for the early church?
- What do you think it would have been like to be a part of the church in this story?
- Did you hear anything that reminded you of *other* stories?

- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- From this story, what do you notice about God’s character or His qualities?

Join the Story

1) WWJD

While every follower of Jesus may not have owned a “WWJD” bracelet – the concept of asking the question, “What would Jesus do?” is one that should be familiar for every disciple. In this story, we see Peter and the other Apostles living the same kind of life that Jesus lived. Why does it seem difficult to live like Jesus lived? Do you think it’s possible that when you live like Jesus lived, you are able to do what Jesus did? Do you have any examples?

2) ALL THE GENTILES

The inclusion of the Gentiles was a difficult step for the early church. There was a lot of discussion and even disagreement over the top at first. Paul was the first to begin to share the message of Jesus with those outside the Jewish community. Why do you think it was important that Peter and others began to see God’s diverse vision for His kingdom? What groups of people are not fully included in the church today? What would it look like if all were truly welcome in the church?

3) FAITHFUL TO THE END

There was clear opposition to the early church, especially from the Jewish Leadership and the Roman government. Many followers of Jesus found themselves persecuted and even put to death for their beliefs. Despite this kind of persecution, Peter boldly shared about his encounters with Jesus until the day he died. How do stories like Peter’s and other faithful followers of Jesus encourage you or inspire you? In what ways do you feel ready to be bold? In what arenas or areas are you hesitant to be bold about your faith?

God,

We have always lived in cultures that attempt to create more barriers between people. Social, economic, racial, gender, political, and worldview barriers divide us and make us feel either arrogant or inferior. Thank You for your Son, Jesus, who broke through these artificial boundaries with His love, acceptance, forgiveness, and His service to the least and the lonely. Teach us to treasure all the people we encounter and to love them enough to seek their greatest good. May we be the kind of people who build redemptive bridges for people who do not yet know You. Amen.