



Relationship Case Study: Peter—Just when you Thought you had it All

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Getting Warmed Up

- Describe the perfect day. (What do you do? Who is with you? What's the temperature?)
- What song would you pick to best describe that perfect day?
- What would ruin the perfect day?
- Have you ever felt like your day was going perfect until one thing made it all fall apart?

Getting Warmed Up

We're going to look at one of Jesus' disciples named Simon, or better known as Peter. (In Greek, Peter means "rock.") Peter had the privilege of being with Jesus during His time here on earth. Over the span of a few years in ministry together, they traveled, ate, shared stories, slept, served others, laughed, and hung out almost every day. Peter was having an incredible time living with this mysterious rabbi. He also passionately sought to follow Jesus. At one point, when many people turned away from Jesus' radical teachings, Peter speaks up and says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6:60-71 ESV)

Peter is the most mentioned of the disciples in the Gospel accounts. This helps paint a picture of Peter's personality and attributes. Peter was enthusiastic, eager to learn, a leader, passionate, quick to speak, and often the first to act. Peter sought unique experiences and was privileged to have exclusive experiences with Jesus that most of the other disciples didn't have. Peter was with Jesus at the transfiguration (Matt 17), in the house of a dead girl raised to life (Luke 8:49-56), and before Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-46). Peter set himself apart from the other disciples and may have felt a sense of entitlement and privilege. At times, Peter had a sense of arrogance.

We're going to take a closer look at a few events in the life of Peter during Jesus' life here on the earth. Identify Peter's characteristics and personality as we walk through the stories.

Peter's Confession of Jesus rocks!

Read Matthew 16:13-20. Have the group open up their Bibles and read aloud.

- What two questions does Jesus put before His disciples?
- Why does He ask these questions?
- What is Peter's response to Jesus in verse 16?
- How does Jesus respond?
- What is the "rock" that Jesus refers to in verse 18?

Peter gets Jesus' point and Jesus praises him for it! Christ also reveals the plan of building His church, which is the assembly of all believers. The solid foundation on which Christ would build His church was Peter's strong, rocklike confession of faith, in which he proclaimed that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v 16). We as Christians, unified to form the church, continue to confess those words today with our lips, but also daily with our lives as we show Christ to the world.

Peter Gets Rocked! (Matthew 16:21-23)

Read verses 21-23.

- Did Peter have good intentions?
- What is wrong with what Peter said?
- Think of a time when you tripped or stubbed your foot on something. It hurts, doesn't it?

Peter, whose name means rock, had become a stumbling block to the gospel. Rather than a useful rock for the living church of Christ, Peter proved himself to be a hindrance. Shortly after making a solid confession of Christ as the Son of God, Peter blows it by scolding Jesus (the Son of the living God) and telling Him a better option. In turn, Jesus' response isn't lighthearted; His response is intense! There are times we are like Peter, failing to understand God's ways, thinking we know better. Even the best of human intentions can be against the will of God.

Peter Affirms Loyalty to Jesus

Read Matthew 26:30-36

- What does Jesus predict?
- How does Peter respond?

Notice the confidence that Peter has in his loyalty and devotion. However, you can also pick up Peter's arrogance when he boldly asserts, "though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away" (v 33). Essentially, Peter is saying, "Ok Jesus, so you may have picked some flakes to be your disciples, and to be honest, I wouldn't have picked them, but I'm no fair-weather follower. I have what it takes; I'm your guy!" He wanted to be more than a disciple of Jesus; he wanted to be THE disciple of Jesus.

- What does Jesus say in response to Peter's claim to loyalty?

Again, Peter has good intentions to follow Jesus, even unto death. It's Peter's fiery passion at it again! Let's move on to see what happens when the going gets tough. Shortly after Jesus predicts the disciple fallout and foretells Peter's denial, Jesus is arrested from a garden outside Jerusalem and is taken to the high priest.

Peter's Loyalty Under Fire

Read John 18:15-18, 25-27

- Why did Peter lie?
- How do you think Peter felt when the rooster crowed?

Peter and John bravely risk their life by following Jesus after his arrest, knowing that someone may recognize them as accomplices of Jesus, the treasonous revolutionary facing trial. Peter's bravery falters when his association with Jesus is put into question. Peter, quick to confess loyalty to Jesus with his mouth, allowed the concern for his self-protection to abandon that loyalty and deny Christ.

Pause to Reflect

We constantly deny Christ when we sin. Sometimes we can have the best of intentions or can be deeply devoted and seeking to follow God, only to find ourselves faltering as Christ's witnesses. Allow for some silent reflection on each of the statements below. If your group is willing to share, take the time to do so.

- Think of a time when you thought you knew better than God.
- Think of a time when you denied Christ out of fear of what others might think or say about you.
- Think of a time when "the rooster crowed" in your life.
- What situations in your life make it tempting for you to be a stumbling block?

Peter Restored Through Christ

Read John 21:15-19

Following Christ's death and resurrection, Jesus made several appearances to the disciples. In one occasion Jesus appeared on the shore while some of the disciples were fishing. When they realized it was Jesus, the disciples came to shore to enjoy breakfast cooked by Jesus. The atmosphere was electric, the disciples were awestruck. After breakfast, Peter and Jesus have a little heart to heart walk along the beach. Three times Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter denied Christ three times, but now Christ invites him to declare his love for Him three times. Jesus didn't need to call out Peter for denying Him. Instead, Jesus focuses on love, restoration, and calling Peter for future service.

Peter Asks about John

Read John 21:20-22

- What is Peter's concern?
- How have you been like Peter in this situation?

How easy it is to look around and compare yourself to others. We notice that people are smarter, better looking, stronger in their faith, more outgoing, etc. To be honest, there will always be that better person. Thankfully, we are not called to be better than everyone else. Jesus doesn't compare people according to our measurements. Thankfully there is a place in God's plan and love for those who don't have everything together. Jesus speaks to us with words of assurance. "What is it to you? You follow me!"

Closing Thoughts

Peter had passion and he sought to be the best. He wanted to be first and to set himself apart from the rest. Before Christ's death, Peter measured his credentials against others around him, boldly stating that while the others will abandon Jesus, his allegiance will never falter. By later denying Christ, Peter realizes that he's not the best and that he had failed.

Through Peter's restoration along the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, Jesus redirects Peter's passion and gives him a calling. Jesus essentially says, "Peter, you say you love me, and I know that you do. Do you know how I want you to use your passion and love for me? I have been feeding my sheep, you have watched me do it, and now I want you to feed my sheep. Follow my lead. Trust me, not yourself and I'll take care of you. Do you remember that time you and the disciples were arguing about who was the best? (Mark 9:34-35) I said to all of you, 'If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.' That is all you need. Peter...Peter, stop looking at John...eyes on me! What does it matter to you what happens to him or anyone else? You are to follow me and no one else!"

Jesus restores Peter and He restores us for service to Him. Peter is transformed and goes on to do extraordinary things for God and the early church. He followed Jesus until his death. We now have that opportunity.

Now Go and Live

Jesus told Peter two things: follow me and feed my people. Jesus gives us two commands: love God and love people. In all that you do, may you seek to reflect those two things.

Love God. Love people. Nothing else matters.