

Impulsive Peter

Peter. Where do we begin? We all love him. Most identify with him. In fact, we usually compare Peter with Paul, and typically most say, "I'm no Paul." This isn't a criticism of Paul; it's just that, for some reason, we see ourselves in Peter a little easier. Actually, I'm going to dig into the "for some reason" part today. Paul typically comes across as extremely driven and disciplined. Yes, he persecuted the Lord's body, but then again, "he thought he was doing the right thing," we reason. Look what he went through. The beatings. The rejection. And without a wife by his side. Paul was tenacious. Guys like Paul had to rebuke guys like Peter, after all. (Of course, I think we all know Paul wasn't perfect, and his drive more than likely would have made him difficult to be around at times.) No, Peter wasn't perfect, but we sure do love him. He truly shines through Scripture, especially the gospel accounts. We call him Peter, but his name was actually Simon. It was Jesus who named him Peter (meaning rock). He's the first name in the list of apostles, Matthew even wording it, "first, Simon, who is called Peter . . ." He's the first apostle Jesus appeared to after the resurrection. I'll be honest - going through every gospel account this week, I was surprised at how many times Peter sticks out as a front man (more than I had remembered in so many ways). He would take the initiative to ask questions, at times speak on behalf of the other apostles, be sent on tasks, pulled into private conversations or settings, and it seems as though his house may have been Jesus' "home base" while teaching in and around Galilee! Yes, we love him. I think we relate to Peter for two reasons: he could be impulsive, overconfident, naive, yet incredibly faithful. We like that story because we can do these things, yet we strive for sincere obedience with the confidence that Jesus forgives. Let's look at some impulsive moments and then remind ourselves of his example of faith in Jesus! These aren't necessarily things that "keep us out of heaven," rather they should be seen as opportunities to grow into the head, who is Christ!

Impulsive Moments:

- [Mark 9:2-8 \(The transfiguration\)](#)
 - He didn't know what to say. Luke's account states he didn't know what he had said. In other words, he wasn't appreciating how inappropriate his statement was, because he spoke before he thought.
 - We're reminded that we don't always have to be the ones to talk. Learn to sit in silence. No one asked Peter to do anything. Sometimes we need to hear the same: stop trying to take control of a situation no one asked you to handle. I love Peter, but that was very presumptuous of him. Don't make yourself the center of attention (whether you were seeking to or not). Let it be.
- [Matthew 14:22-33 \(Walking on water\)](#)

- We're being careful not to seek out something wrong in Peter. Zeal is not a bad thing. But his faith didn't catch up to his zeal. In this instance, Peter felt protected, but his feelings faded once he faced life's realities. The reality was that the wind hit the sea, and the waves were strong - stronger than his faith. He began to sink and cried out. Jesus wouldn't let that happen. Peter actually was okay, but his head hadn't caught up with his heart. So, we're not anti-zeal. We're anti-overconfidence. Feelings over conviction. Heart over head, instead of heart and head.
- Matthew 16:21-23 (Get behind me Satan!)
 - Here's the problem. Not only is Peter inserting himself again (he struggled with this). Not only is he overestimating his own role (which was not above Jesus), but he's underestimating Jesus' role as an atoning victim. Jesus didn't need a stumbling block. He wanted support. He needed Peter to submit to God's plan of salvation, not Satan's desire to destroy it.
 - We've got to know our role, know when we're out of our depth, and not assume we always understand what a person is against. Jesus would face evil head-on and do so flawlessly. Peter, not so much.
 - While we're at it - let's go ahead and throw in Matthew 26:30-35 (Though they all fall away because of You, I will never fall away.) It's the same principle.
- John 13:6-11 (You shall never wash my feet!)
 - "Wash my hands and my head also!" You've got to love him. Really. But sometimes Peter is annoying. You could imagine serving by his side. He'd probably get on your nerves from time to time. "Peter, read the room and quit interrupting Jesus." It's tricky business, because you don't want Peter to lose his zeal. So what is it?
 - Maturity. It's something we're dancing around, but needs to be specifically said. This passage comes across this way (at least to me). There are people who have tons of zeal and may seem to say "deep things", but many times they're simply naive. We've got to remember: all these men were young. We don't know for sure, but the general consensus is they were in their 20s. Matthew was perhaps older, since he held the position of tax collector, and tradition says John died in AD 96/97. So, he was more than likely no older than 30 (at most).
- John 18:10-11 (Struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear)
 - I really do believe Peter meant well, but his arrogance is showing its face once again. Did he really think he knew better than God? Did Jesus need his protection? Did he really think he was in control? There's a sarcastic quip I've heard over the last few years. "You're not the guy" is what one man tells another before a fight potentially breaks out. I love Peter, but at times he needed to hear that message from Jesus. Peter, "you're not the guy."

- Peter was willing to fight for Jesus, but once he realized things weren't going as planned, that scared him more than anything. Of course, as you know, Peter would not only run away, but deny Jesus three times. He was courageous when things were going according to his plan, but when he felt out of control, he showed to be fearful like the rest of us. He wasn't a unique soldier like he boasted of. "Though they all fall away" he said. He denied him in a very personal way.
- [John 21:21-22 \(Lord, what about this man?\)](#)
 - I hope that while we've looked at Peter as an example, we'll turn our attention inward. Before we can truly help anyone else, we've got to seek Jesus' care for our own struggles. Ultimately, it's not "what about Peter," but "what about Shawn?" What about you?

Now, I could preach a whole other lesson on Peter's commendable faith, but here's a quick reminder. It was Peter who . . .

- Luke 5:1-11 (Let down your nets)
 - And did so again in John 21:7
- Matthew 16:13-19 (You are the Christ!)
- John 6:66-69 (Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life)
- Acts 2 (Preaching the gospel)
- Acts 5:29 (We must obey God rather than men)
- Acts 10 (Conversion of Cornelius)

So, here's what I take from Peter. We love him for his zeal. We don't want him to lose it; rather, we want him to use it correctly. God has given us different abilities. Many of them have pros and cons if not used correctly. Zeal is a blessing from God. However, if we're not careful, it can lead to overconfidence, immature or naive decision-making, and a lack of sympathy or understanding for others' experiences. God is patient and will shape us into the image of Christ. He took Peter's love and zeal, taught him humility, and allowed him to serve as a powerful figure in the early church. No doubt, he is in God's tender everlasting care, and we look forward to seeing him one day . . . but not as much as we desire to see Jesus. We're molding into His image, and His alone.