

A MAN LIKE PETER

John 6:66-69; Luke 5:4-11, Selected Texts (NASB)

David Bruce Linn, Pastor-Teacher

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One of the dangers of using Bible characters as our examples is that they often seem so distant—so much like flannel graph figures—that we find it hard to relate to them on a personal level. There are several reasons why we find it hard to relate to the Apostle Peter. On the one hand we see him as a superhero. After all, Peter walked with Jesus and saw his miracles. Jesus included him in the inner circle of disciples with James and John. Peter went on to do his own miracles! Many thousands came to Christ through his ministry. His stature was very great in the early church, and later part of the church mistakenly decided that Peter was actually the first Pope, invested with earthly power to include or exclude people from the church. Few of us, even the most ambitious, can wake up in the morning and say to ourselves: "I'm going to live like the Pope today!"

As hard as it is to follow the example of a superhero, it can be even harder to relate to an antihero. The modern and postmodern world is full of depictions of antiheroes—people who do not model anything we want to follow, who are not good, and who usually live selfishly. In our attempt to show Peter as a real man rather than a two-dimensional medieval painting many evangelicals have portrayed him primarily according to his failings. We have come almost to scorn Peter, one of the founders of the church. None of us would stand up to a relentless listing of his own failings. We cannot follow an antihero any more than we can emulate a superhero.

A truly Biblical perspective of "saint" Peter reveals a wonderful heart for God set against the backdrop of failings which we all share, at least in part. He was a man who did great things in spite of his failings by trusting totally in Jesus Christ. The real Peter led a doable life. A study of a selection of episodes from Peter's life can help us learn to be like him. Though this message is directed toward men, the spiritual principles apply to women as well

ONE HOPE

First and crucial to everything else, a man like Peter knows that Jesus is his only hope. In John 6 Jesus had been giving some hard-to-hear teaching, and people were not reacting well. **"As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. So Jesus said to the twelve, 'You do not want to go away also, do you?' Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God'"** (John 6:66-69).

Hope is a mercurial thing. Without our really noticing it can get fixed on things in which there is no ultimate hope. Men trust their manliness, women trust their womanliness. People with money hope in that, people with brains hope in that. People foolishly hope in government and politics.

How many time have you heard people say: "I don't want any Jesus who pretends that he is the only way," or "I don't want any Jesus who stands against (fill in the blank)." We are not free to remake Jesus in our own image because we have been made in his. The terms of discipleship are immovable

because he is Lord of All the Earth! There is salvation in no other name. So when the chips are down where will you turn? When you read a hard teaching of Jesus what will you do? Run to Buddha? Run to Baha'u'llah who illogically taught that all roads lead to God? When it gets hard run straight to Jesus, even if your problem is with him! Men like Peter take great care to place their hope in Jesus Christ and him alone.

REPENTANT

Secondly, a man like Peter lets the kindness of Jesus lead him to repentance. Jesus had a classic spiritual confrontation with Peter at the beach: **"When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered and said, 'Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets.' When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, 'Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!'"** (Luke 5:4-8). Jesus overwhelmed Peter with kindness, not condemnation. He did not say: "You are a dirty sinner, Peter. Now get down and worship me." No, he did a miracle of blessing by filling the nets of professional fisherman who had failed to catch fish all night. Today he might close a stuck coolant valve on a nuclear reactor or recover the eight million dollars a friend of mine lost his company when he made a programming error.

Jesus approaches every one of us the same way. He has granted us life and breath. The Bible says that every good thing we have came from God. And the smashing kindness of all is the unfathomable grace of forgiveness. When we are honest with ourselves we admit that we really are like Peter. How is it possible for God to forgive anyone who has thought, said, and done the things we know we have? There is a beautiful song with the line: "I cannot tell why he whom angels worship should set his love upon the sons of men." We cannot tell why, but he has done so! Peter fell to the ground before the kindness of Jesus and confessed his unworthiness and sinfulness. We need to let the kindness of Jesus pierce our hearts the same way.

This is also an important means to reach out to others in Christ's name. You may have seen the bumper sticker: "Practice random acts of kindness." I would urge instead that you practice highly purposeful acts of kindness in Jesus' name! That does not mean that you give a sermon every time you are helping people. Do the act of kindness and point to the Jesus who does the miracles.

RESPONSIVE TO THE CALL

Thirdly, a man like Peter responds to the call of Christ. Luke 5:9-11 continues the above story: **"For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.' When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him."**

The most important response we must make is to receive Christ for salvation. Bound up with that is Christ's desire to be with us and have us with him. In Matthew's account of this interaction Jesus

said: "**Follow me!**" And he wants us to be with him also. Knowing and following Christ deserves our full attention, and so there are things which must be left behind. The disciples left behind their businesses because of their special role. Few of us will be asked to do that, but some will.

If your shooting, car, or sports club only meets on Sunday mornings, you may have to give that up. Following Jesus does not mean that you should never go, but all true followers of Jesus find a time and place to worship him with the body of Christ every week. Following Christ may mean that you have to leave behind certain entertainments, some of your friends, and some favorite activities. The spiritual model here is clear. The disciples "**left everything.**" We do that in principle to make ourselves available to Jesus, and then he will put all of our life's interests into perspective.

Another part of responding to the call of Christ is to adopt his mission to fish for people. This is not an optional part of discipleship! And we start right where we live. You do not need any advanced training to pursue the mission of Jesus Christ. Start by asking people about their personal stories, and then tell yours. This can be done in any context. It is not a sales presentation because followers of Jesus have nothing to sell.

Often people wonder how they can encourage people to grow once they become disciples. Just get together, read the Bible together, talk about what it means, and pray about the things on your heart. You really cannot fail at this unless you choose not to try. Our local church has a mission to help people connect with the body of Christ. Almost all of us eat out from time to time. Just invite someone from church to go with you, preferably someone new. Church growth experts tell us this personal touch is the most powerful thing a local church can do to help people connect in a meaningful way. Are you on mission with Jesus? Men like Peter are.

OBEDIENT

Fourthly, a man like Peter does whatever Jesus tells him to do. The disciples who followed Jesus in those early days received a surprising set of commands found in Matthew 10:5-8: "**These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: 'Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.'**"

Jesus sent the twelve to preach and do miracles, and that's what they did! Apart from the good news itself, each of us receives a different set of good things from God. The key is that last phrase: "**Freely you received, freely give.**" How would you have responded if Jesus told you to go on a preaching tour with no money or change of clothes? How would you have responded to the command to do miracles of healing and deliverance from demons? The whole point is that we give what God gives us to give, and we simply do what Jesus tells us to do--whether it makes sense to us or not!

Men, Jesus commands you to love your wives. Women, you are commanded to respect your husbands. Will you do what Jesus tells you? He may command you to do some things that are going to hurt. You may become part of a situation where a sacrifice is the only solution. Jesus commands us, so far as it depends on us, to be at peace with all people. Will you do that? Is there a family member or friend whom you need to call and ask forgiveness? Men like Peter just do what Jesus tells them.

WILLING TO TAKE FAITH RISKS

Fifthly, a man like Peter takes risks for Jesus. The story is told in Matthew 14 of the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus taught the people all day, fed them at the end of the day, and then sent his disciples across the lake in a boat while he went to the mountain to pray. The wind blew hard against the disciples. Jesus did one of the things for which he is renowned: he walked to them on the water. The disciples were terrified when they saw this, and we cut to the story just after Jesus spoke words of comfort to them: **"Peter said to Him, 'Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.' And He said, 'Come!' And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus"** (Matthew 14:28-29).

Actuaries are people who use mathematics to determine risk. They usually work for insurance companies. For example, in order for me to get a little life insurance I had to agree to stop jumping out of airplanes. I've only done it once, and I didn't like it that much, so it was no problem. It does not take an actuary to conclude that Peter's attempt to walk on water with Jesus involved a risk! A first century actuary from Mutual of Jerusalem might have said: "Let's see, man sees another man walking on water and invites himself to go with. Life insurance denied! Cancel this man's policy immediately!"

There is no way to remove the risk in following Jesus Christ in a fallen world. No one can guarantee our missionaries that they will not get sick, shot, kidnapped, raped, swindled, robbed, or murdered. All of these things have happened to our missionaries. When Nebuchadnezzar demanded that everyone worship the idol of gold which he had made on pain of being thrown in the fiery furnace Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied: **"If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up"** (Daniel 3:17-18). Notice that they trusted God for deliverance, but admitted that the deliverance might mean their immediate promotion to heaven!

Men, are you willing to risk your possessions for Jesus? If you invite people for Bible study they might spill coffee on the carpet. Their punk-rocker son might fall in love with your daughter. They might accidentally set your house on fire when they go outside to smoke. Are you willing to risk your reputation by spending time with someone the world thinks is deplorable? People who risk earthly things out of obedience to Christ are considered fools on this earth. Will you invest in the kingdom of God which cannot fail and be thought a fool, or buy into the latest IPO and be thought wise? Men like Peter take risks for Jesus.

PRAYERFUL

Sixthly, a man like Peter goes with Jesus to the mountain to pray. Luke records: **"Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming"** (Luke 9:28-29). In all honesty, we do not see much of a prayerful spirit in Peter until after the resurrection. But here we see Jesus taking Peter along for fellowship in prayer. And we see a grand purpose of Christ for taking him along. Peter was granted a revelation of the true glory of Christ. He must have thought: *This dirty-sandaled carpenter really is the Son of God!* Jesus

wants to do the same thing for us in prayer.

Do you want to see the reality of Jesus in a personal way? Go to the mountain to pray. That may mean any location where you can stop being interrupted by the demands of this life. A mountain is a desolate place and is therefore a great place to pray! My study at the church is not the place where I spend extended time in prayer with Jesus. It is too full of calendars, to do lists, and communication devices. I mostly pray ministry-related prayers there, both with others and by myself as things arise. The office staff and I pray every morning. But it is no place for quiet fellowship with Christ in prayer.

Some of you hunt, fish, camp, hike, and just enjoy the outdoors. Those are great times to pray. I have found that a long ride on my motorcycle can be a good time to pray since I don't have a radio. Some of us run and bicycle. Sitting in a garden or on a beach is excellent. Any environment where you can disconnect and give Jesus your full attention is a good place for prayer. If we are willing to get quiet and concentrate on him, he will reward us with a vision of his glory. Men like Peter go the mountain to pray.

I hope that you have seen that the example of Peter is eminently doable. We will not be just like him, but we can have every certainty that God will work great things in us as well! The fact of Peter's occasional spiritual flops makes him all the more an example for folks like us. Peter was a manly man who wept over his sin (Luke 22:60-61), yet stood up to be the leader the early church needed in the forgiveness of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

What is getting in the way of walking the path that Peter walked? Is there some sin with its claws in you, and you do not think you can ever get those claws out? I advise you to repent and ask the Holy Spirit to work his transforming power in you. Have you heard the call of the Lord Jesus to follow him and you have not yet responded? Now is the time to get this right! Don't let another moment pass without confessing your sins, throwing yourself on his forgiveness, and asking for the filling of the Holy Spirit. There can be no life change without that change of heart.

[clip from *The Visual Bible, Gospel of John*, 0:55:00-0:57:16, 2:16 min., GOSPEL_OF_JOHN_Peters_only_hope.avi]