

Published based on [Why Peter?](#)

Why Peter?

Those familiar with the New Testament often refer to Peter as the disciple who opened his mouth to change feet.

We think of Peter denying Jesus. Peter, the one who said what we all would like to say, "Jesus, how many times do I really have to forgive this person before I can say 'That's it. I have fulfilled my quota. I don't have to forgive you anymore.'" Peter, who told Jesus, "You'll never wash MY feet!" Sounds ridiculous now, but how would you have felt at that moment? We think of Peter cutting off Malchus' ear. We think of his rash statement to Jesus, "I'll never deny you!"

The first time we are introduced to Peter is when his brother Andrew brings him to Jesus. Immediately Jesus looks at Peter and begins to tell Peter about himself. Jesus said, "You are Simon, the son of Jonah, but you will be called Cephas." Ever wonder what it felt like to be inside Peter's skin at that moment? His brother, Andrew, told him that they had found the Messiah, the One they had lived all their lives learning about; the One who would rescue the Jewish nation; the One who would fulfill the prophecies. Perhaps Peter is skeptical at that first moment but also hopeful. Could this man be the One? And Peter begins his experiences with Jesus with an identity encounter. Jesus basically says, "Peter, I know you, and I know who you will become. You are going to change."

I imagine that Peter looked back to that moment many times during his life. I believe it was a moment that he "hung his hat on". A Hallmark moment. A moment that Peter could look back upon and be grateful for. A moment that Peter could cherish as he reflected upon the fact that Jesus knew all about him from the very first moment. I believe that moment was a gift to Peter.

We all long for someone to know us intimately. Someone to understand us. Someone to believe in our future. That was the beginning moment of Peter's walk with Jesus.

Last night I pondered why Jesus made such a concerted effort to minister to Peter after Peter denied Him. Hadn't all the disciples run away? They all deserted Jesus. Yes, Peter verbally said, "I don't know the man", but hadn't they all basically asserted the same thing by their actions? And of course, I understand that Peter had a great destiny. God was going to use him mightily on the Day of Pentecost and beyond. But as I meditated on this last night, I had a feeling that there was more to it than that. Not that those factors were not important. Of course they were. But maybe another reason the Scripture is so purposeful in tracing Peter's walk with Jesus is that it so adequately pictures all our lives.

We are up; then we are down. We have a success; then we fail. We say something profound; we say something stupid. We are bold; we are afraid.

But if God could use Peter whose journey with Jesus encompassed such extreme ends of life's spectrum, perhaps the message to us is that our lives are also redeemable. Perhaps the message is that if Jesus intimately knew Peter right from the beginning – He knew that Peter would fail miserably – and yet he chose Peter, then maybe he also could also use us.

Peter was with Jesus right from the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. He was there when the water was turned into wine. He was there when the loaves and fishes multiplied. He saw people dramatically healed. He ate with Jesus. He was there when the disciples argued about who was the greatest. He was at the Transfiguration and got a glimpse of Jesus' heavenly glory. He was at the Last Supper. He heard the prophecies. Yet during Jesus most difficult days, Peter failed. He couldn't stay awake when Jesus' heart was anguishing in the Garden of Gethsemane. He denied Jesus to a servant girl. He denied him again. And not only did Peter fall asleep while he was supposed to be praying with Jesus, now he denies even being there! Then he denied Jesus to a man who was a relative of the Malchus. Malchus was with the crowd who came to arrest Jesus in the Garden. Peter drew his sword, cut off Malchus' ear. Jesus rebukes Peter, again, and heals Malchus. Do you get that? Peter had been rash, reactive, and cut off the servant's ear. Jesus fixes Peter's mistake, and now Peter denies Jesus to Malchus' relative.

But once again, Jesus had spoken beforehand to Peter. He had told him, "Peter, you will deny me three times

but I have prayed for you already. Again Jesus knows Peter's failure ahead of time. And he says, "I have prayed for you that your faith wouldn't fail." Notice that Jesus didn't say that he prayed Peter wouldn't fail. Of course, he didn't want Peter to fail, yet he said he prayed that Peter's faith wouldn't fail. Ahead of time, Jesus tells Peter "When you have returned..." Do you think that Peter might have heard those words over and over after he denied Jesus? "When you have returned...When you have returned..." In his darkest moments, I imagine that these words resonated in Peter's spirit and blew on the embers of his faith. *Jesus knew I would fail, but he said I would return.* Jesus understood that God would use Peter's failure. It was not unredeemable. But he prayed that Peter would not lose his faith. I don't think that Jesus was saying he was worried about Peter losing his salvation. I think he was saying that he was concerned that Peter's failure not destroy him, but be used by God to strengthen others. "When you have returned, strengthen your brothers."

I guess what I am saying in part is that it is easy to sanitize the Gospel. It is easy to only view the disciples through their glorious moments. But God's Word takes pains to show us the fullness of human experience so that we can identify with what we would call the "great" men and women of God. Was Peter great? Yes, he was, but he was also a man. Flawed in ways. Weak at times. He had his moments when perhaps we would have said to him, "Duh, stupid." Oh, we could never imagine that now because it would be less than reverent. But have we stripped away one of the aspects of humanness of God's servants that God never meant us to? If we sanitize the Gospel so that only great, perfect people are the heroes, then the message to the world is that the Gospel is not for you. It is only for the strong. Oh, I know we would never actually say that, but is that in fact what we are saying to lost humanity when what God is trying to say is that the Gospel is for the weak, the foolish, the fallen.

Please don't misunderstand me. I am not excusing sin at all. I am not saying that there are excuses for our sinfulness. I am saying that there is provision for our humanness.

Oh, we might say that this was all prior to the crucifixion and that afterwards Peter was different. I beg to differ with you. What about after Jesus resurrection when he has breakfast with Peter. We still find Peter being Peter. Jesus tells him that there are some tough times ahead for Peter and then Peter basically says, "Well, Lord, if I am going to suffer, what about John?" to which Jesus replies, "That is none of your business, Peter. That is up to me." Peter still has some things to learn.

Just a matter of days later, Peter is there when the Holy Spirit is poured out and with boldness he begins again to lead the disciples. He preaches on the Day of Pentecost. He proclaims to the lame man that there is a way to be healed. It is Jesus. Then after Pentecost, Paul has to correct Peter for shying away from the Gentiles when the Jews were around.

From failure to fullness. Peter, just an ordinary man, finds Jesus. He begins to follow him. And still today the Gospel message is preached through Peter's life. God uses imperfect people. It is the message I have long loved. From the first moment I was captured by the idea that God could use me, I have been in awe of this message because I know my own heart. And just like Peter, I hang my hat on the revelation that God knows me intimately and yet loves me and works in and through my life.

Perhaps the words to the old hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" say it best of all. *Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.*

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