

CHALLENGE AND GRACE

John 21:15-19

Even though, based on our appearances, we might seem different from one another, we all experience very similar internal lives. For example, we all struggle with feelings of inadequacy, fear, and shame. We all experience frustration, anger, and uncertainty. We might do a good job hiding those feelings from one another, but we all encounter them. Our shared experiences with those emotions prompt our consideration of Peter in this lesson. The New Testament's account of Peter draws attention to his struggles to highlight Jesus' response. Therefore, we will consider some of Peter's struggles to see what insights they may offer us into our relationship with Jesus.

Beginning considerations

- Jesus carefully and prayerfully selected his apostles (*Luke 6:12-16*).
- He chose men suited to the critical task he entrusted them (*cf. Acts 1:6-8*).
- While the qualifications he sought included ability, Jesus focused on the heart (*cf. Matthew 15:10-16*).

Jesus and Peter

- Even though Jesus selected Peter as one of his apostles, Peter possessed an impulsiveness and thoughtlessness that Jesus repeatedly criticized. Consider the following interactions between Jesus and Peter:
 - Matthew 14:22-32 - Jesus rebuked Peter for doubting, calling him a man "of little faith."¹
 - Matthew 16:13-23 - Jesus condemned Peter for setting his mind "on the things of man" rather than "the things of God."
 - Matthew 26:30-35 - After being told by Jesus that he would reject him, Peter denied Jesus' statement and declared he would "never fall away."
 - Mark 14:37 - Jesus chastised Peter for being unable to "watch one hour" with him.
 - John 13:1-9 - Jesus warned Peter that refusing to allow him to wash his feet meant he would "have no share with [him]."
- Despite his trouble-causing brashness, Peter did possess praiseworthy qualities. For example:
 - Peter recognized both his unworthiness and Jesus' worthiness (*Luke 5:1-11*).
 - He recognized that Jesus alone had "the words of life" (*John 6:68*).
 - Peter occupied a vital role in the early church, providing effective and inspiring leadership at critical moments (*Acts 1-12*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- Consider the following three passages – passages the Bible intentionally connects – that illustrate the transformation Jesus effected in Peter:
 - **Matthew 26:30-35, 69-75** - Peter denies Jesus three times.
 - Peter’s misunderstandings about Jesus’ mission and meaning led him to reject Jesus’ clear and repeated announcements about his impending death (*cf. Matthew 16:21-23; 17:22-23; Luke 18:31-34*).
 - Jesus informed Peter that his misunderstandings would lead him to reject him three times.
 - **John 21:15-19** - Jesus confronts Peter’s weak love three times
 - Following his death and resurrection, Jesus walked with Peter along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and challenged Peter’s love for him.
 - Jesus’ three questions to Peter about his love for him reminded Peter of his recent denials of Jesus and forced him to consider his relationship with Jesus.
 - Nevertheless, Jesus let Peter know that he would one day develop the love he desired from him and commissioned struggling Peter with the responsibility of leading his “sheep.”
 - **Acts 10:9-43** - God sends Peter a vision three times.
 - Peter, a third time, received a challenging threefold message. This third message sought to push Peter to fulfill the mission Jesus gave to him and the other apostles in Acts 1:8.
 - While Peter struggled to understand the message he received, he listened and obeyed, unlike the previous times.
- Jesus placed challenging expectations on Peter but coupled those expectations with patience and grace. The patience and grace Jesus extended to Peter motivated a transformation within him - Peter grew from an impulsive man of “little faith” to a man characterized by humble and submissive faithfulness (*cf. 1, 2 Peter*).

Jesus, Peter, and Us

- Do not forget – Jesus came to save rather than condemn (*John 3:17*).
- Even though he came to accomplish a saving mission, Jesus places a challenging demand on all who follow him – he asks us to relinquish control of our lives to him (*John 21:18; Matthew 10:37-39; 16:24-25*).
- Jesus does not remove that challenge, but he does extend gracious and patient help that enables us to meet its demand.
- Jesus’ comment to Peter as they walked on the beach in John 21 reminds us that we need to adopt a long-term view of our life with Jesus (*John 21:18*).

