

Peter: The Man of Power

“And the believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them” (Acts 5:14-15).

Peter was the chief disciple of Jesus Christ. In every listing of the disciples Peter is mentioned first. His name is mentioned 146 times in the Gospels and 57 times in Acts. He consistently takes the lead and seems to be a “born leader.” He was quick to ask Jesus questions and to give advice. He revealed that Jesus was the Christ and exercised faith by trying to walk on water. He is the only one who tried to protect the Lord on the night of His betrayal. He is the most prominent person in the first 12 chapters of Acts. He was the native of a small fishing village called Bethsaida but moved his business to the larger, commercial city of Capernaum. He owned a large house there and was a successful businessman. He likely had a primary school education and was referred to by the Sanhedrin in Acts 4 as “ignorant and unlearned.”

His character is one of the most charming in the New Testament because it shows his humanness. He was eager, energetic, impulsive, confident, bold, daring, but also weak, and cowardly. He was tenderhearted, self-sacrificing, and loving. He quickly moves from one extreme to another. He was inconsistent, unstable, and outspoken. When empowered by the Spirit he became powerful, stable, humble, bold, and courageous.

The Gospel accounts close with Peter defeated and having denied the Lord. The *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* gives seven steps to his fall:

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| 1. Conceit | Matthew 26:33 |
| 2. Ease | Matthew 26:40 |
| 3. Rashness | John 18:10-11 |
| 4. Following afar off | Matthew 26:58 |
| 5. Evil Associations | John 18:18 |
| 6. Open Denial | John 18:25 |
| 7. Blasphemy | Mark 14:70-71 |

As you read the Book of Acts you can see:

- Peter was a man of power and had great influence in the Early Church.
- He was the most powerful person in the Early Church.
- He was a bold preacher, prayer warrior, and used in the Gifts of the Spirit.
- He gave wise direction and supervision to the church.
- Peter was a leader.
- Although Peter had power we never read of him misusing it.
- He did not involve himself in a power struggle nor did he seem to be power hungry.
- Even though Peter had been given the Keys to the Kingdom, preached the first Pentecostal sermon, and was the speaker for the group we do not find him assuming authority.
- He did not try to exercise authority over the others.
- He seems to have been respected by the others and looked up to as their leader.
- He is the one Paul went to see after his conversion (Galatians 1:18).
- He not only preached the first Pentecostal sermon but also performed the first Pentecostal miracle.
- In his miracle ministry he exposed the sin of Ananias and Sapphira.

Character Studies

- He could have used his association with Jesus and his anointing to promote himself but he didn't.
- People brought their sick hoping his shadow would overshadow them.

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* writes, "Peter...exhibits the qualities of Jesus that the Holy Spirit shaped in him: a readiness to embrace suffering rather than prestige, a wisdom developed from experience and not imposed from a book, a humility that lacked nothing in vigor and imagination. From what we know of the early stories of Peter he had in him all the makings of a bully. That he didn't become a bully (and religious bullies are the worst kind) but rather the boldly confident and humbly self-effacing servant of Jesus Christ...is a compelling witness to what he describes as a brand-new life, with everything to live for."

(Note: A 'bully' is "someone who enjoys oppressing others weaker than himself" *Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*.)

Many leaders today would have misused this power and would try to manipulate people. Peter has given a wonderful example for all leaders to follow.

Peter in the Book of Acts:

Acts 1:1-26	Part of the 120
Acts 2:1-47	Pentecost's Spokesman/Preacher
Acts 3:1-11	Heals Lame Man
Acts 4:1-35	Boldly Stands Before Sanhedrin
Acts 5:1-11	Exposes Ananias and Sapphira
Acts 5:17-42	Gamaliel
Acts 8:14-25	Deals with Simon the Sorcerer

Lesson 33

Acts 9:32-35	Heals the Cripple
Acts 9:36-43	Dorcas Raised from the Dead
Acts 10:1-48	Preached to the Gentiles
Acts 11:1-18	Defends His Actions
Acts 12:1-24	Peter and the Angel

What Can We Learn from Peter's Life

The *Revell Bible Dictionary* suggests areas we can learn from the life of Peter. These are adapted here:

Peter Walks on the Water (Matthew 14:22-33)

Even though his faith wavered he had courage to step onto the water.

Peter Rebukes Jesus (Matthew 16: 21-28)

If we accept Jesus we must submit our understanding to Him also.

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial (Mark 14:27-31)

Peter learned he was weak. We must rely on God rather than ourselves.

Jesus Restores Peter (John 21:15-25)

God can use us despite our failures.

Peter Preaches the First Sermon (Acts 2)

God will back up His Word with results.

Peter Welcomes the Gentiles (Acts 11)

Character Studies

When attacked about preaching to the Gentiles he carefully related what happened and explained how God had led him. He showed wisdom and courtesy in his actions.

Paul Berates Peter for Discrimination (Galatians 2:11-21)

No matter how important we may be, we still need others to rebuke us when we are wrong. We are not above mistakes or correction.

Study Questions

- 1. How do we know Peter was Jesus' chief disciple?
2. What type of education did this great man of God have?
3. Explain, in general, the steps that led to the fall of Peter?
4. What was Peter like after empowered by the Spirit?
5. Outline some of the points that made Peter a good leader.

- 6. List four things Peter did in the Book of Acts?

- 7. What are four different things we can learn from the life of Peter (according to Revell Bible Dictionary)?

Additional Notes