

I Peter 1:1 Leader's Reflection Guide

Strangers and Aliens

1 Peter 4:3 For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. 4 With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;

The Christians to whom Peter wrote were living by different priorities, values, and allegiances than their pagan neighbors...they were beginning to pay the price for it:

- refused to engage in emperor worship or participate in national festivals and feasts they were **seen as treasonous...**
- Tacitus went as far as saying that "Christians had a hatred of man-kind".
- when they wouldn't participate with their families in feasts and worship to their gods they were **seen as disrespectful and were disowned.**
- trades in the empire were held together by guilds that each had particular gods and ceremonies dedicated to them. When Christians refused to be a part of them they **were seen as unprofessional at best...**likely cut off, demoted, lost income b/c of Jesus.

There was a time in our culture when being a follower of Jesus was a cultural card that you could play in situations and it could actually help and it certainly wouldn't hurt ...but now people are indifferent at best or antagonistic and hostile at worst.

**How are you experiencing this now in your personal dealings with others?
(Note: don't let people go on cultural or political tangents. Make this personal)**

2 Typical Responses to being treated like this:

- 1 - Withdraw - try to cut ourselves off from the surrounding world as best we can
- 2 - Accommodate - shed all offensive realities until we are accepted

The problem is that you can never really withdraw completely and Jesus Himself said that he was sending us out into the world to live as salt and light in the world that people from every corner of the world could be saved. So to withdraw is to be disobedient and to accommodate is to lose our distinctiveness.

Do you typically withdraw or accommodate? Why do you think that is? What (who) are you afraid of right now?

Peter - the man and author

1 Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

Who better to write a letter to the church on the brink of folding to pressure...than Peter?

There is 1 significant event from the life of Peter that I think shapes the tone of his letter to the church more than any other.

The Boast

Matthew 26:30-35 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 31 Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' 32 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."

33 Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."

34 Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."

35 Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!"

The Denial

It would just be hours later that Peter, brokenhearted Peter, found himself weeping bitterly having just denied Jesus, not once but 3 times. For many people, this would have meant the end. Just imagine it...if you're like me it's not hard to b/c more than anyone else, I resonate with Peter.

Can you relate to Peter? Impulsive and grand? Weak and Denying?

When that kind of tragedy occurs, it's tempting to conclude that you're through forever, isn't it? You may never have explicitly denied the Lord. But chances are you know the feeling of having failed to live up to your testimony through a failed Christian witness at home, work, or school, or perhaps an unfortunate string of words said in an angry outburst you wish you could retrieve.

The Plan

Luke 22:31-32

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers".

The Restoration

The good news is that failure is never final. No failure, no denial, no sin can trump the grace of God that restores the repentant rebel. Peter's life illustrates this beautifully...he'd come to learn just how significant Jesus death is.

MK. 16:4-7

Immediately after the resurrection, an angel at the empty tomb instructed the women, *"Go, tell His disciples and Peter"*. The angel intentionally singled Peter out for the message that Jesus had risen from the dead. What does this say to us?

Jesus took YOUR sin on his body. Look at his particular care and atonement for Peter. He was forgiven for his denial because Jesus died for Peter's denial. Jesus died for the particular sins of his people that they would YET commit. He had us and our sins in mind when he went to the cross.

Do you believe this? Does your understanding of salvation line up with this? How does this encourage you?

JN. 21:15

In the days that followed as Jesus would be with his disciples and after having b-fast with them he turns to Peter and asks, *"Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?"* (John 21:15). The verb Jesus uses is AGAPE or unconditional love. This is what Peter had proclaimed before his denial. Imagine the

gut punch...the shame. Peter replies to Jesus' question, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You", but he uses the verb PHILEO or brotherly love. What do learn from this?

- Peter wasn't claiming superiority anymore
- this was the humility of a man broken by his sin...what Jesus wanted
- transformation
- So Jesus responds to Peter, "*Tend my lambs*".
- **Peter was now restored and ready.**

How Did Peter Respond? (How did grace work in Peter?)

In Acts 1 after Jesus pours out the HS at Pentecost, Peter is the guy who steps forward and preaches that rich Gospel sermon after which thousands get saved.

- Peter took the lead in choosing a twelfth disciple to take Judas's place (Acts 1).
- Peter, with John, healed the lame man at the temple (Acts 3).
- Peter defied the Sanhedrin when he refused to stop preaching Jesus (Acts 4).
- Peter courageously presided over the task of dealing with the deception of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).
- Peter confirmed the preaching of the gospel to the Samaritans and dealt with the deceit of Simon the Magician (Acts 8).
- Peter healed the sick and raised the dead in Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa (Acts 9).

But was Peter perfect now? No. He still backed away from Jesus in light of pressure from others.

At Antioch Paul had to publicly rebuke Peter for hypocritically withdrawing himself from the Gentile believers when Jewish believers from Jerusalem arrived. Paul referred to Peter when he reported:

*But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. Prior to the coming of certain men from James, [Peter] used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, **fearing the party of the circumcision**. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. (Gal. 2:11–13)*

At the Jerusalem council Peter stood up and made it clear that the Gospel of God's Grace in Jesus was not only for the Jews but the gentiles as well apart from works of the Law.

*"Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? **But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.**" (Act 15:7–11)*

Peter writes:

*1 Peter 5:12 I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that **this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.***

- **What does standing in the true grace of God mean for you right now?**
- **What failure are you struggling to get over?**
- **Is your sin / failure worse than Peter's?**
- **Do you think Peter struggled again after getting rebuked again for denying Jesus? (first by Jesus, then by Paul?)**
- **What part of atonement / grace / forgiveness are struggling to believe?**
- **How can we encourage one another in light of this?**