

LifeWay Family Bible Series for Aug. 1: Peter's principles for helping others succeed_72604

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Peter's principles for helping others succeed

Matthew 4:18-20; 14:25-33; John 1:40-42

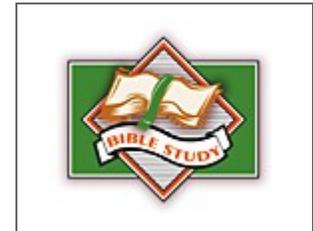
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One of the most fascinating characters of the Bible is Simon Peter. I refer to him as the “foot-in-mouth” apostle. Maybe that is why I like him so much. He is like me, maybe like you too. He speaks first and thinks later. He believes with all his heart and then acts like he never heard of Jesus. His “believer” and his “actor” never quite seem to stay in sync. He preaches and he stumbles. He confesses and he denies. In short, he is real. There is nothing phony or pretentious about him.

For the next five weeks, we will study the life of Simon Peter. The writers of the Family Bible Study materials have called this study, “Peter's Principles for Successful Living.” I think I know what they mean by that, but something about the theme bothers me. It makes the Bible and Simon Peter

sound like the self-help gurus on the info-mercials that want to sell me some product that will make me thinner, happier, wealthier, richer and more successful. Surely that would make me more likeable. Do you think God gives us grace so we can spend it on our success?



I thought I might like the theme “Peter's Principles for Helping Others Succeed.” That would get closer to the intent of the gospel of a Savior who taught us to care more about others than ourselves. But this theme does not match the facts of the biblical account of Peter's life either. The fact is Peter never seemed to think ahead enough to come up with any principles for living, let alone successful living. He seems to have been guided more by passions than principles.

The Apostle Paul tells of an experience with Peter at the church in Galatia. It seems the two of them were ministering in the church and participating in the pot luck dinners with the Gentiles. Then some Jews from Jerusalem showed up. Peter suddenly lost his appetite for ham sandwiches and withdrew from the Gentiles at dinner time. Paul did not recommend to the Galatians that they undertake a five-week study of “Peter's Principles for Successful Living.” He corrected him. He pointed out his hypocrisy. Even in his supposed mature years, the apostle was still learning.

You may be thinking at this point, “I don't think this guy likes Peter.” On the contrary! I love this man. We can learn boat loads from him. You just can't boil it down to five principles, seven keys, six habits, four laws or three life-changing characteristics.

Peter could hardly be called purpose driven. He was passion driven. Israel

was full of folks who legalistically followed all kinds of principles. Jesus was looking for some folks who could be passionate about his kingdom. Two events at the Sea of Galilee illustrate this.

Peter was a fisherman when Jesus found him. He and his brother Andrew carried on the family business. Jesus said to them, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). He followed. And he stayed for the long haul. It was not principles he followed. It was a person. Jesus would teach him many things, even some principles. But mostly, he would teach him how to be his disciple and how to love his people. It required passion.

Following Jesus is a process. He said, "I will make you fishers of men." Peter and Andrew were not men-fishers when they left the nets, any more than David was a king the moment Samuel poured the anointing oil on his head. It would take some time, but it would happen. They would become exactly what Jesus said. It would take a lifetime. Are you still becoming what Jesus called you to be?

On another occasion, Peter and the other disciples were rowing across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus came walking to them on the water. When Peter saw him he said, "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water" (Matthew 14:28). As passionate as ever, Peter hopped out of the boat after Jesus told him to come. He walked right on top of the water. For awhile! Then he began to sink, and he cried out to Jesus, "Lord, save me!" Has he ever had to rescue you?

I have always wondered if the other disciples teased Peter about that experience. I have played a little golf in my life, and one of the certainties about golfing with men is that you will receive all sorts of unsolicited advice. And never let a golfer tell you they are laughing with you. They are laughing at you and your bad shot. Surely they teased him often about it. I don't think he cared. Peter would rather be wave-walking with Jesus than

playing it safe in the boat.

Peter was not a man who understood it all. He just believed in Jesus. If Jesus wanted him to follow, he would go. If he wanted him to walk on the water, he would put on his jogging shoes and leave his swim flippers at home. That is passion. And that is what it takes to follow Jesus. What are you passionate about?

Questions for discussion

- ◆ When you think of Peter, which of his characteristics springs to mind first? When people think of you, what do you believe comes to mind most quickly for them?

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