

Explore the Bible: With Trust

October 26, 2016

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Nov. 13 focuses on 2 Peter 1:12-21.*

One night years ago, I was having difficulty with a new cell phone. I called customer service. For what seemed like an eternity, the agent and I attempted to diagnose and remedy the problem.

Finally, the agent said: "Let me talk with one of my colleagues. He's used this phone, and I have not."

"You mean to tell me that, all this time, you've been trying to advise me on a phone you've never used?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," he responded.

Worn out and totally frustrated, I decided to end the call before I said something I'd regret for a long time.

If there is anything in shorter supply in our world or anything people are craving more than authenticity, it would be hard to know what that might be. Our presidential election brings this into sharp relief. In our time, authenticity is a currency with few rivals.

Importance of authenticity

Peter knew this to be true in his day, as well. As his life neared its end, even as the church was in its infancy, Peter seems to have felt compelled to remind believers of the fundamentals of their faith as stated in the verses preceding today's text.

In verses 2:3-11, Peter laid out the basics at the core of being faithful to the call of Christ on the life of a believer. These include being constantly

attentive to personal integrity, as well as the importance of community in remaining faithful. They are demanding and stringent.

First-hand witness

As the basis of his credibility for making such demands, Peter reminds the early church of the authenticity of his faith. He'd personally been an eyewitness of Jesus' "majesty" (2:16).

In a court of law, third-party testimony is referred to as hearsay. Any person seeking to testify on a certain issue must be able to report having witnessed the issue first-hand. It is not legitimately authentic testimony if one simply reports what he or she heard from someone else about the matter.

When I was in college, a dear friend of mine presumed to develop a marriage enrichment course for churches—even though he'd never been married himself. To say the least, the program was a total bust. Although he'd spent good money developing and promoting the program, he didn't seem to grasp the fact that no one wanted to hear marriage advice from someone who never had experienced marriage.

It was not that he lacked integrity. He simply lacked the authenticity of personal experience.

We cannot give to people what we don't have. Put another way, we can only extend to others what we have experienced personally.

Personal experience

In my early days, I always was star-struck when, attending evangelism conferences, we'd hear dramatic testimonies from people who'd been saved from a life of drug or alcohol addictions when they became Christians.

For years, though I'd never had those experiences, I felt compelled to tell

some kind of dramatic story as part of my testimony. I was older than I'd care to admit when it finally occurred to me that all God expected me to share with others was what I had personally experienced in my relationship with him. I cannot authentically give something to others that I don't already know from personal experience.

Authentic relationship

There are multiple ways of trying to understand this text. It is legitimate to focus on the specific responsibilities with which Peter was charging the early believers. However, in attempting to understand those matters, it is vital that we not overlook the role Peter's authentic relationship with Christ played in his teachings.

This text forms a great foundation for people to reflect on their unique relationship with Christ. We may not have personally encountered the majesty of the risen Christ. So, what have we personally experienced in our walk with Christ? Whatever that might be, that is all God requires we share with others in attempting to encourage them toward faith in Christ.

Referring to his personal witnessing of the transfiguration as recorded in Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-9 and Luke 9:28-36, Peter reports having personally heard the voice of God (2:18). I cannot report ever having heard the voice of God.

What I can report are those times when God revealed himself to me. Sometimes, that encounter took place in a moment of terrible loss or sadness, such as when a loved one died. Other times, it came to me in moments of grand worship, as it once happened in a moment of private worship on top of a mountain in New Mexico.

Yet, it is also worthy of noting how many times Peter uses the pronoun "we" or "our" in reporting of his encounters with God in verses 2:12-18. It was Peter's experience that authentic encounters with God happen more

often in community with others. God more often than not reveals himself through others.

We cannot give the world what we do not have. Yet, no matter how simple our testimony may seem to us, if it is authentically our experience, God will multiply the effect of our personal encounter with Christ well beyond our ability to convince others, no matter how profound our witness may or may not be.

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