

## First Responders Week Four- Peter and Paul

### Day One

Although the apostle Paul demonstrated fierce opposition to the early church before his conversion, even then, he showed measured responses. Peter, in contrast, acted impulsively on a regular basis. These two men did much to shape the early Christian church and our present Scriptures. We consider them giants of faith, but the scriptures also reveal their flaws. God's history of using imperfect humans is as old as creation.

Might God have entrusted more scripture writing to Peter had he mastered his passions more quickly? Is it possible Paul may have recognized Jesus as the Messiah more quickly if he hadn't been so ponderously calculated in his moves? To stay in step with the Spirit requires a balance between passion and thoughtfulness. Out of balance, we either run ahead of God or lag behind. Let's study these two men to discover where we fall on that continuum between a life that responds and moves with God and one that is reactively controlled by the flesh.

Read: Luke 5:1-11, Luke 9:28-31

1. Describe what we learn about Peter's life, prior to following Jesus, in the first passage.
2. Why do you think Peter said yes to Jesus' invitation so quickly? Read John 1:35-42 to help with this answer. Do you think this was an impulsive move or not? Why?
3. Why do you think Jesus invited the impulsive fisherman, Peter, to be part of his innermost circle? Why him instead of Matthew, a Levite or Nathanael, a sincere lover of God? (John 1:47)
4. Have you ever felt like you lacked the right skills, education, or personality to perform a task for the kingdom? Where do you think we get the idea that God is looking at our outer personas instead of our hearts? Are you allowing emotions and negative thinking to hold you back from something God is calling you to do?

Prayer: God, forgive me for disqualifying myself from opportunities in the past you designed for me and fill me with the faith it will take to seize and act upon opportunities from you in the future.

## Day Two-Peter and Paul

Peter was an outgoing, natural leader, who often spoke up for the other twelve. The Scriptures mention his name more than any other disciple. He was also the only married disciple and the older brother of Andrew. Today let's look at a couple crazy impulsive moments in the life of the one Jesus interestingly called, "The Rock."

Read: Matthew 14:25-31 and Matthew 16:13-23

1. Peter demonstrates a pattern of behavior of vacillating between faith and doubt which is common to many believers. Describe his behavior in these two accounts.
2. Did anyone else besides Peter attempt to join Jesus on the water? What do you think this story reveals about both positive and negative character qualities in Peter and the other disciples?
3. How do you think Peter felt going from hero (Blessed are you Simon) to zero (Get thee behind me Satan) so quickly, especially with so many witnesses? Speculate about how Peter could so boldly proclaim Jesus as the Messiah then argue with what Jesus said about his upcoming death.
4. Can you think of a time when you wavered between acting in faith or reacting with emotions? What helped you hold onto your faith at that time? What things caused you to doubt?
5. Although Jesus chose Peter to be part of his innermost circle, he didn't hold back rebuke when Peter fell into sin. God may also discipline us when we choose to doubt his character and Word and nurture unbelief in our hearts and minds. What do you think that discipline looks or sounds like in your own life or in the life of another?

Prayer: God, grow bold, consistent, unwavering faith in me that calls those things that are not as though they are, (Rom. 4:17) and casts obstructing mountains into the sea. (Mk. 11:23)

### Day Three- Peter and Paul

After Christ's resurrection, Peter became a spokesperson for the disciples and a teacher himself. Quite a career change for a professional fisherman. The importance of what happened in Acts 10 and 11 is profound for Gentile and Jewish believers alike. God used Peter as a key to open a doorway between the Jewish people and the rest of the world so the gospel could spread freely to Gentiles. What if Peter had refused Cornelius' invitation to come to his home and teach? Would God have used someone else? Would the gospel message have been delayed in its worldwide outreach?

Read: Acts 10:1-28 and Romans 3:22-24

1. In your own words, describe what we know about Cornelius.
2. Describe the vision Peter had and what you think it represents.
3. Jewish law prohibited Jews from entering a Gentile home. Did Peter disregard this law? Do you think his behavior was impulsive and reckless or measured and obedient? Why?
4. If someone you knew went against your church or denominational regulations because they told you they'd had a vision and a word from God, what would be your reaction? Be honest.
5. What would you do if God came to you in the form of a vision and a word? What spiritual journey do you need to make to be obedient like Peter? What would stop you from obeying?

Prayer: God forgive me for undervaluing myself and your desire to partner with me to accomplish great things for the kingdom. Work into me everything needed for me to obey you and work out of me anything that is a hindrance to my obedience.

## Day Four- Peter and Paul

As impulsive as Peter was, Paul was a cautious, slow to come to the truth, kind of guy. After he fully embraced and understood the truth of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, he became fearless for the gospel. Paul traveled to many places where he knew he'd be a target for those who hated the gospel. Before that, it seems that he struggled to know and act on truth.

Read: Philippians 3:4-6, Acts 7:51-53, Acts 8:1

1. Summarize Paul's lineage and background in your own words.
2. Paul signed on to the stoning of Stephen, yet it doesn't seem that he actively participated in the actual stoning process. What do you make of that?
3. Try to imagine a modern-day Stephen confronting religious folks in our present culture. What sins or ungodly behaviors in the modern church might a prophet of today challenge and question?
4. As a follower of God, can you think of a time when you were not certain of your convictions on a particular matter, like Paul? A time when you gave your words to something but not your actions?
5. Even after hearing Stephen's anointed preaching and then watching him die in faith, courageously, Paul is not persuaded the Jesus is the Messiah. What do you think held Paul back from believing in and following Christ as quickly as the disciples?

Prayer: God keep me in step with your Spirit and each new thing you wish to do through me. Forgive me for times I've lagged behind, caught up in my own human reasoning.

## Day Five- Peter and Paul

After Paul's conversion to Christ, he becomes a template of the Spirit-led life for centuries of believers. He knew when to move and when to stay. He understood when to speak and when to be silent. Sometimes he acted boldly, almost outrageously. Other times he proceeded with caution. As you read the scripture passage, imagine how you might react or respond in each set of circumstances that presented themselves to Paul.

Read: Acts 16

1. In verses 6-8, describe what it looked and sounded like in real time when the Holy Spirit banned Paul, Silas and Timothy from going certain places. How did they know this was what the Spirit was saying to them?
2. The three missionaries set the course of their journey based on a vision of Paul's. How do you think they knew it was a direction-giving vision and not just a weird dream? Have you ever set a course of behavior or direction based on a vision God's given to you? How did you know it was God speaking to you?
3. In verses 19-24, when Paul and Silas were seized and dragged into the marketplace, beaten, then put in jail, why do you think they didn't speak up and protest this unfair treatment of Roman citizens right away? Why did they hold their tongues?
4. What is the response of Paul and Silas to their imprisonment? Can you think of a time when you were treated harshly and unjustly? How did you behave?
5. Why do you think Paul insisted the magistrates come see he and Silas out of the city, instead of just quietly leaving? Wasn't that a risky move?

Prayer: Lord, teach me and train me to become better at listening to and discerning the Holy Spirit's leading so that you can use me in greater and greater ways.

I hope you learned a bit about responding versus reacting through the lives of these saints. Did you discover places your character needs to grow? If your answer is yes, I suggest you use the following chart to be deliberate and scripture-centered in how you grow as a responder, the kind of person that people look up to when life goes wonky. I'm expecting life to get a lot wonkier in the days to come. Will you fall into your old patterns of reacting, or will you allow God to grow you in this area? The chart on the next page, is merely a tool to help you be honest about your weak places and partner with God to strengthen those areas.

Think carefully about situations or people that typically evoke a negative reaction in you. Think about how these people and places press your buttons and how you currently behave. Next, dream and envision how God wants you to respond, based on what he's revealed to you in his Word. Finally, what scripture should you commit to memory so that you are prepared the next time you are tempted? For example, because I've struggled in the past with a tricky digestive tract, being caught in intense traffic jams used to create a fear response in me. I had to learn to speak scripture and peace to my soul during those times so I could calmly wait.

To further help you, here are some Scriptures that I believe speak into this area of responding versus reacting.

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you.

2 Thessalonians 3:5 May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

2 Peter 1:5-7 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

2 Peter 3:17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

Ephesians 4:14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." John 16:33

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:7

"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. 2 Thessalonians 3:16

My Challenging Situation	My Normal Reaction	God's New Vision for Me	Supporting scripture

