

Loyal?
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Matthew 26:63-75

Opening: The hallmark of a successful product is high brand loyalty. **Are you loyal to certain brands or do you tend to be more of a shopper and swapper? What percentage of American consumers would you guess are loyal vs shopping around?**

This morning's lesson focuses on LOYALTY. It's the familiar and tragic story of Peter's denials of Jesus when Jesus was on trial.

The big idea: Following Christ demands loyalty in the face of risk. Peter failed that test while Jesus was on trial. But that wasn't the end of Peter's story. Thanks to the mercy and grace of God, Peter was restored to become the "rock" Jesus called him to be.

The bad news: We are more like the pre-resurrection Simon Peter than we'd like to admit. The good news: We can be more like Peter the Apostle than we might believe, thanks to the grace of God.

After his arrest, Jesus was subjected to a series of "kangaroo court" trials. Because it was the middle of the night, and they were rushing to kill him before Passover, the first hearing was at the home of Caiaphas the high priest.

We believe it was a palatial mansion big enough to accommodate a significant number of scribes and elders plus some curiosity seekers. One of those huddled outside and interested was Simon Peter.

The Jewish leaders sought to find false testimony to convict Jesus of violating Roman law so the Romans would execute Him. Nothing was working; the witnesses were contradicting each other. One of them twisted Jesus' words: "*This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'*" Jesus was silent. The high priest attempted to pry a response from Him.

Matthew 26:63–75 (ESV)

⁶³ But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”

⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” ⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What is your judgment?” They answered, “He deserves death.” ⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, ⁶⁸ saying, “Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?”

Peter Denies Jesus

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.”

⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.” ⁷¹ And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.”

⁷² And again he denied it with an oath: “I do not know the man.” ⁷³ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.” ⁷⁴ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” And immediately the rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

[Luke adds an important detail: Luke 22:61–62 (ESV)]

⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord...]

Jump back up to verse 31:

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!” And all the disciples said the same.

- **When you think of Simon Peter, the one before the resurrection, what words would describe his personality? If you were giving a reference for the “pre-resurrection” Peter, what would you tell someone?**
- Rick Warren uses Peter as a textbook example in a sermon titled “Overcome Your Failures Through God's Mercy.” He writes: *“Because we’re imperfect people living in an imperfect world we all experience failures in life. The night Jesus was arrested, two of his closest friends had massive failures: Judas betrayed him and Peter denied him. It was the same sin, just expressed in different ways. What causes our personal failures? Like Peter, we 1) overestimate our own strength; 2) fear the disapproval of others, and 3) speak without thinking.”*¹
- Aren’t we like that at times? *“Well I would never give into the temptation to commit that sin! My faith is stronger than that!”* Really?
- *“And I certainly would never deny being a follower of Christ!”* What if your job was on the line? What if your freedom was on the line? What if your life was at risk?
- It’s interesting to notice the progression of Peter’s three denials.
- Verse 70: *“I don’t know what you mean!”* Then he went out to the entrance. He expressed confusion then he changed locations.
- Verses 71 & 72: Another servant girl, *“He was with Jesus!”* This time Peter said: *“I don’t even know that man!”* and he added an oath probably invoking the name of God. ²
- Verse 73: *“You even SOUND like one of those Galileans. You MUST be one of Jesus’ men!”* This time Peter invokes a curse on himself and swore. We joke about Peter “cussing,” one commentator writes: *“[This] does not mean he used foul language. This was the kind of swearing that a person does in a court of law. Peter was swearing that he did not know Jesus and was invoking a curse on himself if his words were untrue. In effect was saying, “May God strike me dead if I am lying.”* ³
- See the progression of Peter’s denials? Confusion, then “So help me God...” and finally, *“May God strike me dead, I don’t know the man!”*

- What a contrast! *“While Jesus holds up astonishingly well under life-threatening conditions before the most powerful authorities in Judaism, Peter fails miserably under far less threatening conditions in the presence of people of very little status.”*⁴
- Wiersbe makes an interesting point: *“Peter has been criticized for following “afar off” (Matt. 26:58); but that was not his mistake. His mistake was that he followed at all. He was supposed to get out! Jesus had warned Peter that he would deny Him...Jesus had expressly commanded the disciples not to follow: “Let these go their way” (John 18:8–9). If Peter had listened to the word and obeyed it, he would never have failed the Lord in such a humiliating way.”*⁵ Peter was doing things HIS way!
- Here’s what’s interesting: the amazing transformation in Peter AFTER Jesus’ resurrection compared to the Simon Peter before the resurrection.
- The Peter we read about in the book of Acts had maturity about him that Simon Peter before the resurrection didn’t have.
- Simon Peter was brash, impetuous, overly self confident, and immature.
- The Apostle Peter in Acts was a new man. Though he still had his lapses into the old Simon at times,⁶ the RESTORED Apostle Peter was a bold proclaimer of the gospel, a miracle worker, an authoritative figure in the early church, the first missionary to the Gentiles, and a missionary to the Jews outside of Jerusalem, and ultimately, died a martyr’s death...⁷
- I’m using the resurrection as the dividing line in Peter’s life, but it’s really about Peter’s RESTORATION by Jesus.
- Peter repented and Jesus restored him. In fact, when Jesus rose from the grave He singled Peter out. Look at this:

Mark 16:7 (ESV)

7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”

1 Corinthians 15:5 (ESV)

5 and that he appeared to Cephas,[Peter] then to the twelve.

- Restoring Peter was a priority for Jesus after His resurrection. It happened over breakfast on the beach.

John 21:15–19 (NLT)

¹⁵ After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” Peter replied, “you know I love you.”

“Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him.

¹⁶ Jesus repeated the question: “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord,” Peter said, “you know I love you.”

“Then take care of my sheep,” Jesus said.

¹⁷ A third time he asked him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep.

- In that moment, Jesus was saying, *“Peter, you’re forgiven and restored. I have an important job for you Peter. Remember what I told you before? You’re a ‘rock’ and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven”*⁸
- Satan tempted Peter just as Jesus had warned Him, and Peter failed miserably. But that’s not the end of the story for Peter or for you and me.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Sir Edward Elgar was a well-known English composer. We’re told: *“He once listened to a young girl singing a solo from one of his own works. She had a voice of exceptional purity and clarity and range, an almost perfect technique. When she had finished, Sir Edward said softly, “She will be really great when something happens to break her heart.”*⁹
- Simon Peter couldn’t become the Apostle Peter until God broke him.
- As Rick Warren said, *“Like Peter, we 1) overestimate our own strength; 2) fear the disapproval of others, and 3) speak without thinking.*

- *But Peter also did three things right. He 1) grieved his failure; 2) let his small group support him; and 3) cast himself on God's mercy."* So can we!
- Peter himself put it well when he wrote:
- 1 Peter 1:3 (ESV) ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
- We are more like the pre-resurrection Simon Peter than we'd like to admit. The good news: We can be more like Peter the Apostle than we might believe, thanks to the grace of God.

¹ http://saddlebackmediawest.s3.amazonaws.com/18796-TIO_GodsMercyMyFailuresMiracleofMercyPart3.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIUGRYVGGFJHZ7PBQ&Expires=1494595951&Signature=ugyv37ZheUhm1%2fep%2fdsNOjForbQ%3d

² Blomberg, Craig L.. *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (The New American Commentary)* (p. 404). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition..

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Tyndale. *Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size)* (Kindle Locations 161382-161383). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Blomberg, Craig L.. *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (The New American Commentary)* (p. 404). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 99). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁶ Even as an apostle, Peter experienced some growing pains. At first, he had resisted taking the gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile. However, when he saw the Romans receive the Holy Spirit in the same manner he had, Peter concluded that "God does not show favoritism" ([Acts 10:34](#)). After that, Peter strongly defended the Gentiles' position as believers and was adamant that they did not need to conform to Jewish law ([Acts 15:7-11](#)).

Another episode of growth in Peter's life concerns his visit to Antioch, where he enjoyed the fellowship of Gentile believers. However, when some legalistic Jews arrived in Antioch, Peter, to appease them, withdrew from the Gentile Christians. The Apostle Paul saw this as hypocrisy and called it such to Peter's face ([Galatians 2:11-14](#)). <https://www.gotquestions.org/life-Peter.html>

⁷ Gish, J. (2016). Peter the Apostle. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁸ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Mt 16:18–19). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁹ Walsh, Sheila. *God Loves Broken People: (and Those Who Pretend They're Not)*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012. Print.