

Occasionally you will meet someone who is a few steps ahead of you in life, and because they walked the road you are getting ready to walk, they can be an example or a guide to you. When I was a freshman in college, I had two upperclassmen who mentored me and took me under their wings—they helped me pick out my classes and showed me the ropes around campus. My first boss did more than just give me assignments; he mentored me and invested into my life. He had been hired a few years before me and he was able to help me navigate my new role. Most of us have had people like that in our lives, even if it's just someone who teaches you how to play a new game or sport, someone who has more experience than you do who you can learn from, in whose steps you can follow.

Today, as we continue in our series on the gospel of Luke and look at some of the one-on-one interactions Jesus had with people, we are going to get a window into his relationship with Peter. If you brought your Bibles, turn with me to Luke 9. Peter is one of Jesus' twelve apostles; he is one of the closest people to Jesus and is the leader of the apostles. In this chapter, Peter has a very interesting series of interactions with Jesus, three specific touch points with Jesus. We are going to look at each of them. Peter is that person who is just a few steps ahead of us in his relationship with Jesus; his interactions with Jesus are a kind of grid or rubric that we can look to and learn invaluable lessons about our own walk with Jesus. Peter's journey has three elements to it: **the declaration, the revelation, and the affirmation.**

Let's begin with **the declaration.** "Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say I am?'" (Luke 9:18). This is two years into Jesus' public ministry. For 24 months Jesus has been among the people, preaching the kingdom of God, healing the sick, raising the dead. He just took two fish and five loaves and fed thousands of people. You get the sense that people, especially those who have been with him from the beginning, should be putting two and two together by now.

"They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life'" (Luke 9:19). This is an interesting response. Jesus was doing the sorts of things that some of their prophets who came before had done, so the people assumed there was some sort of reincarnation thing happening. Jesus wasn't particularly satisfied with the content of the rumor mill, so he asks the disciples another question: "'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'God's Messiah'" (Luke 9:20). "Messiah" is the Greek word for "Christ." "Christ" is not Jesus' last name; it's his title. Biden's first name isn't "President." "President" is his title; it means he's the leader of our country. When Peter says Jesus is the Christ, God's Messiah, he's declaring that Jesus is the one God has chosen to lead the world, the long awaited King. It's as if he's saying, "Other people might think you are simply a good teacher or miracle worker or moral influencer, but I am ready and willing to make the declaration that you are so much more: you are the Messiah for whom we have been praying and hoping for over a thousand years."

So that's the declaration; now let's look at **the revelation.** "Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone" (Luke 9:21). Jesus knew if word started circulating, not only would the crowds swarm to him like paparazzi to celebrities, but they would also place on him their own inaccurate expectations of who the Messiah was supposed to be, rather than accept what Jesus came to do. The result would not be greater clarity, but more confusion.

Then the real news comes: "And he said, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life'" (Luke 9:22). There are not sufficient words to describe how surprised and bewildered the disciples would have been by this statement. Everyone knew, deep in their bones, that when the Messiah came, he

was going to rule. He was God's appointed leader, the king. He would defeat God's enemies, purify the religious establishment, and usher in a reign of righteousness and peace. That's what all the prophecies they've ever heard promised them. Acceptance, not rejection. Evil people being punished and killed by the Messiah, not evil people punishing and killing him. The last thing they ever expected to hear was that the Messiah was going to save the world through a sacrificial death. What an unexpected revelation!

Then Jesus goes on to say, "And, in case you were wondering, the suffering and hardship and carrying the cross thing—it's not just for me; it's for anyone who wants to follow me."

"Then he said to them all: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?'" (Luke 9:23-25). Do you see the way Jesus intensified things for Peter and the disciples? It's not only Jesus who has to deny himself and take up his cross—so do they. This is not what the disciples signed up for. They wanted to grab hold of a rocket on a meteoric rise to the top. They wanted success and influence, wealth and power. But Jesus says he's more like an anchor—you grab hold of him, and he pulls you lower and lower. He's not going to catapult you ahead of people; he's going to call you to place yourself beneath people as their servant. Jesus says that is the way of the kingdom, that is the only way to real life. Just like Jesus only experienced resurrection power after he took up his cross, we'll only experience true life as we take up our cross as well.

Peter has having none of it! This was not the sort of Messianic movement he signed up for. He decided to talk some sense into Jesus, to help him get his head on straight again. "Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him" (Mark 8:32b). "Come on Jesus, you don't really want to go to a cross. Sacrifice? Come on! Crush these Romans like Thor! Give them what they deserve. And you take what you deserve." How did Jesus respond? Jesus rebuked Peter. "'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns'" (Mark 8:33). Wow. That's intense. Most of us have had some pretty bad days—a car accident, spilled grape juice on white carpet, sick kids—but none of us have had Jesus look us in the eye and say, "Get behind me, Satan!" There's a lot we could say about this, but let me reduce it down to two things. First, Satan was trying to convince Jesus to avoid the cross, a trap Jesus would not fall for. Second—and more relevant for us—Satan tried to convince Peter to avoid the cross in his life, just like he does in all of ours, a trap we far too often fall into. But Jesus says if you try to gain the world, you'll lose it. The only way to find your life is to lay it down for Jesus.

The declaration: Jesus is the Messiah. **The revelation:** he's a Messiah who is going to lay down his life, and he calls his followers to lay down their lives, as well. That sets us up for **the affirmation**, which comes in the next few verses: "About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray" (Luke 9:28). Peter is here again, and like in verse 18, Jesus is praying with his disciples, helping us to see a connection between these two passages.

"As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning" (Luke 9:29). This is what theologians refer to as the transfiguration, a moment in Jesus' earthly life where his heavenly identity was revealed: his glory, splendor, and majesty on full display.

Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.) (Luke 9:30-33)

The Bible tells us that Peter didn't know what he was saying. We've all been there, where there is an awkward silence and we feel the need to just start talking. "Uh, uh, Moses, heaven has done wonders for your skin. Is that botox? Beard extensions?" Can you imagine being in this scenario? There is a bright flash of light and then all of a sudden two people who have been dead for about 1,000 years show up and start talking to Jesus—and the first thing you say is, "Hey, why don't I blow up some air mattresses and we can have a sleepover!" He didn't even know what he was saying!

The key thing to take note of here is not what Peter said, but who showed up—Moses and Elijah. In common vernacular, the entire Old Testament is summed up by the phrase "the law and the prophets." God revealed his will through the law and the prophets. Moses represents the law, Elijah represents the prophets. So the two men who represent the way in which God has communicated to the world appear, which is a symbolic way of indicating that it will no longer be by the law and the prophets that God speaks to us. It will now be through Jesus. God the Father makes this point clear: "While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him'" (Luke 9:34-35). God himself spoke from heaven and said, "Jesus is my son; he is the one I have chosen. Peter, you were right, Jesus is the Christ! He is the Messiah! But Peter, it's not just that you were right about Jesus' identity. Jesus was right about the path of suffering and sacrifice. He was right about taking up his cross and laying down his life, and about you taking up your cross and laying down your life. So what do you need to do? Listen to him!" This is the Father's affirmation that Jesus is the Messiah, and that sacrificial love is the way in which he will save the world and the only way of life in the kingdom of God. Is it different than you thought? Yes. Is it more costly than you imagined? Yes! But listen to him. He's right.

In this passage we've seen the declaration, the revelation, and the affirmation. Now it's time to turn the tables and talk about how we are supposed to respond to it. Again, Peter's interactions with Jesus are an example for all of us. Here's the first application:

Make a decision about Jesus. Do you remember how Jesus forced Peter to tell him what he thought about him? What are people saying about me? OK. What about you, who do you say I am? Sooner or later, everyone is put in Peter's position, where we have to decide what we personally believe about Jesus. It's not like someone going on a first date, and after 90 minutes of talking over coffee, the person drops down on a knee and asks you to marry them. Even if it was a great date, you need to slow down and take your time! On the other hand, if you've been dating for 2 years, you've been hanging out almost every day for 24 months, it probably is time for there to be a serious discussion about a lifelong commitment.

Jesus knows exactly where every person is at, and he meets them right where they are. There may be people here today who are hearing about Jesus for the first time. Or maybe you got burned by religion a long time ago and you are just showing up to church to kind of anonymously dip your toes back in the water and see if you can find some healing. If that is you, I think the invitation from Jesus is to take your time. Get to know him. Like the disciples, you will find in him a truth, a love, a power, a grace unlike anything this world has to offer. There may be people here today who have been on that journey for a while. You've taken several months, maybe a couple years—you've gotten to know Jesus. You've been coming to church, you've been reading the Bible, you've been having important conversations. And if that's you, I think Jesus is saying, "It's time to make a decision. I'm not that focused right now on what everyone else says about me—what about you? Who do you say I am?" Even more than the decision about who you are going to marry, this is the one decision that matters more than any other decision in your entire life. This is the decision that changes everything about you! Romans 10:9 says, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Last week, nine people at The Creek decided to make that decision. Maybe today is your day!

One of my favorite Bible scholars on the gospel of Luke is Darrell Bock. He said, “There is no greater tragedy in life than to underestimate Jesus.” I don’t know where each of you are at. For some of you, you may still be in the getting-to-know-Jesus stage. But for others, today might be the day that you make a decision about Jesus and declare that he is the Messiah, he is the one who has come from heaven to save the world!

That leads to the second application: **deny yourself and take up your cross**. This is a particularly hard message for us to hear today, because our entire lives we’ve been taught to think like Peter—climb the ladder, promote ourselves, seek advancement, and always look out for our own best interests. Jesus doesn’t tell us to climb the ladder, but to take up our cross. Let’s look at his words one more time: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?” (Luke 9:23-25). Jesus is giving us the counterintuitive way to find real life, real joy, real satisfaction—not through self-promotion or advancement, but through sacrifice. That’s what taking up the cross daily means. In my old hometown, there was a guy who took this literally. He had a twelve foot cross that he put wheels on, and he walked through town every day carrying the cross. His intentions were good, but the application was wrong. Jesus isn’t telling us to carry a wooden instrument. He’s telling us to willingly lay down our lives, give up our rights and our resources because we love God and love others more than ourselves. How does this look today?

In the most extreme cases, in some parts of the world, it means knowing that believing in Jesus could cost you your life. Over the last 2,000 years, estimates are that over 70,000,000 people have been martyred for their faith in Jesus. Tens of millions of people believed in Jesus, even though it cost them everything! I have a pastor friend who went to Africa recently and got to preach to a remote tribe. He asked if anyone wanted to accept Jesus, and about a dozen people said yes. The next day, two men in their early twenties showed up in the village where he preached, each with a bag over his shoulders carrying most of his belongings. My friend asked what was going on. They said their families ostracized them when they placed their faith in Jesus. They knew the price when they made the decision to believe in Jesus. That’s not happening in this country, but there might still be relational fallout with your family, you could lose acceptance with your friends, you could be passed over for a promotion at work, especially if your job is in academia or certain science fields.

But living a life of sacrificial love, putting God and others before yourself can look as simple as:

- Gladly doing more dishes and chores than your roommates or your spouse. Is it fair? Maybe not, but you are willing to die to yourself to serve and treat them better than yourself.
- Being willing to forgive a wrong or forgive a debt. Most of the time, when someone owes us something, they need to pay us back to make it even. But when we forgive, we pay the price; we absorb the cost and die to ourselves to show love for another.
- Living on less than your income in order to share your resources with the poor.
- Giving up free times to serve your friends, your neighbors, people in your life group or at-risk youth.
- Being the primary care provider for an aging parent, where you take months or even years of your life to provide dignity and love for the person who brought you into the world, even though they may not remember you anymore.

The world says, “Take care of # 1, promote yourself, chase your dreams.” Jesus says, “Take up your cross, lay down your life, put God first, put others above yourself. When you lay down your life that’s when you really find it.” Remember, Peter didn’t want to do it. Peter didn’t want Jesus to suffer. Peter

didn't want to have to suffer. He wanted the prosperous road of accumulation, not abnegation. And what did Jesus say to him? "Get behind me Satan."

Last week we talked about the reality that we have an enemy who wants to tempt us and thwart God's plans for our lives. One of the most powerful, strategic ways Satan tempts us today is to convince us that we can be faithful followers of Jesus without denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and embracing sacrifice. We need to see through that temptation, and with Jesus' help, overcome it!

We've talked about making a decision to follow Jesus and about embracing the cross, committing to a life of sacrifice and love. The final application is to **trust Jesus in every area of life**. When Jesus told Peter that as the Messiah, he was going to suffer, and that as his follower, Peter was going to suffer, Peter said: "No, Jesus, you are wrong." He rebuked the Messiah because he thought he knew best. Fortunately, before long, Peter saw Jesus revealed in the splendor and majesty of heaven and heard God the Father say: "Jesus is my son, listen to him." He heard a voice from heaven say, "No matter what Jesus tells you, no matter how crazy it sounds or how costly it may be, listen to him." I think we need to commit to doing the same thing in our lives.

Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Six different times throughout the sermon he gave an antithesis. A thesis is where someone tells you their premise, their big idea. Jesus' antithesis is where he rejects the prevailing wisdom of the world. He rejects the premises we have been building our lives on, and he gives us a different way to live. Six times he says, "You have heard that it was said, but I say to you." Others have taught you this, you have come to believe this, but I say to you. Jesus recognizes that we have all been shaped by various ideas, teachers, and philosophies, but he tells us how we are really supposed to live. And here's the thing—sometimes we approach Jesus like a savvy lawyer, looking to write a contract with loopholes and exception clauses so we avoid sacrifice. "I'll follow Jesus, but I'm not going to forgive the people who hurt me like the Bible tells me to. I'll follow Jesus, but I'm not going to be committed to a church like the Bible tells me to. I'll follow Jesus, but I'm not going to save myself for marriage like the Bible tells me to. I'll follow Jesus, but I'm not going to be generous with my money like the Bible tells me to." In other words, "I'll follow Jesus, but in these areas, I'll listen to my own advice." That doesn't work in the kingdom.

When I was 23 years old, I had just graduated college and moved to a new city, where I was serving as a pastor. I was going to try to buy a home. One of the elders of the church, who was an incredibly successful financial advisor, billions of dollars under management, invited me over to his house and said, "I don't think this is a good time to buy a home. If you want to, I can't stop you, but I don't recommend it." I had to decide—I have no experience in life and no money to my name; he is 30 years older than me and has been managing money for a living for a decade. Who was I going to listen to? I was wise enough at the time to listen to him. Two months later was the housing crash of 2008. I am so grateful that I listened to an expert.

Jesus is an expert on how to live life. He is the author of life. He knows infinitely more than all of us. So no matter what he might be asking of you, no matter what he might be calling you to do—listen to him. It might not be your personal preference; it might not make sense to everyone else—listen to Jesus.

Peter is like that guy who is a few steps ahead of us in life, a few steps ahead of us in following Jesus. We get to look at his example, learn from his relationship with Jesus, and put it into practice in our lives.

I am so inspired by the way a woman named Summer lived this out. Listen to her story.

For years I struggled with one particular addiction. I tried to surrender it to God, but I kept ignoring his voice and following something other than Jesus. I couldn't set aside my own selfishness. I not only hurt myself, but the lives of the people around me. I knew that a follower of Jesus had to hand over everything to him, but for the longest time I couldn't bring myself to give him the controls of my life. Then finally I made the decision to fully surrender everything to him. I was baptized. I consciously chose to give up everything, including my addiction, to walk with Jesus. Before I tried to find victory in my own strength; now I am walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. Each day I wake up and I say out loud, "I am going to deny myself, surrender to you, and be your disciple."

She decided to become a disciple of Jesus. Surrendering to him came at a price. That's what Summer did. In his own way, that's what Peter did. What about the rest of us? Will we make the declaration that Jesus is the Messiah? Will we die to ourselves? And will we listen to Jesus as the Lord and leader of our lives?