

A BIT MORE 1 PETER

Peter's concise confession of Jesus, 'you are the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matthew 16:16) focused the faith of the disciples on Jesus as God among us, in person, carrying out the eternal work of salvation. Peter seems to have been a natural leader, commanding the respect of his peers by sheer force of personality. In every listing of Jesus' disciples, Peter's name is invariably first.

In the early church, Peter's influence was enormous and acknowledged by all. By virtue of his position, he was easily the most powerful figure in the Christian community. His energetic preaching, ardent prayer, bold healing and wise direction, confirmed the trust placed in him.

The way Peter handled himself in that position of power is even more impressive than the power itself. He stayed out of the centre, didn't 'wield' power and maintained a scrupulous subordination to Jesus. Given his charismatic personality and well-deserved position at the head, he could easily have taken over, using the prominence of his association with Jesus to promote himself. That he didn't do it, given the frequency with which spiritual leaders do exactly that, is impressive. Peter is a breath of fresh air.

Both letters Peter wrote exhibit the qualities of Jesus that the Holy Spirit shaped in him: a readiness to embrace suffering rather than prestige, a wisdom developed from experience and not imposed from a book, a humility that lacked nothing in vigour or imagination. From what we know of the early stories of Peter, he had in him the makings of a bully. That he didn't become a bully (and religious bullies are the worst kind) but rather the boldly confident and humble self-effacing servant of Jesus Christ that we discern in his letters, is a compelling witness to what he himself describes as a 'brand new life with everything to live for.'

Summary from 'The Message' Bible (Eugene H Peterson)