

## If Peter had stayed behind at the well, instead of Jesus.

This assignment imagines a conversation between Sammi, a vulnerable woman, and Pete, a man she meets.

In the 'Take 1' version, Pete makes errors, shown **in bold**. These often end the conversation, so the bold sections rewind and are replaced with better responses, which are consolidated in 'Take 2'. Pete and Sammi's thoughts and actions are shown *[in italics]*. Comments are in the side bar.

In the first version, Pete is oblivious to Sammi's unspoken messages and often responds inappropriately. He approaches the conversation with an agenda and is repeatedly distracted by either his own interests or by Sammi's tentative attempts to avoid uncomfortable topics. Pete is embarrassed by silence and misses opportunities for deepening the conversation. At several points the conversation ends because Sammi storms off, offended.

In the second version, Pete involves God in the encounter - before, during and after – and so sees Sammi through God's eyes as a child of God worthy of forgiveness and restoration. Pete is aware of the effect of his presence on the meeting and of his biases and assumptions. He is careful to maintain propriety and treats Sammi with respect throughout. Pete is sensitive to Sammi's tone of voice and posture, and picks up unspoken messages. When he senses that she is feeling particularly vulnerable, he takes steps to show that he is not a threat. He does not attempt to steer Sammi in any direction and is careful not to condemn her past choices. He reflects on the meeting afterwards.

Only by avoiding all the pitfalls of Take 1 does Pete bring God's healing and restoration to Sammi's life. He models the patience and acceptance that we see of God with his people (eg Ps, 103:8), and Sammi becomes aware of the need to change her life without external pressure. Sammi learns to see herself as God sees her, dearly loved and worthy of forgiveness.

Word count (excluding repeated script & references) = 2195

## Take 1

Scene: A hot, dusty market square at midday. The square is deserted except for Sammi, a woman in her late twenties, drawing water from a well. She is wearing a red gown tied with a fringed scarf and her black hair hangs loose about her shoulders.

Enter Pete, a man in his early thirties. His beard and hair are unkempt, and his robe is dirty from the road. He looks around for shade but seeing none, he ambles to the well and sits heavily on the parapet. He nods at Sammi, who looks away.

**Pete** *[I know who she is. She needs to change her lifestyle. I'll tell her what she's doing wrong.] You there. Go fetch your husband.*

Pete has an agenda which he wants to impose on Sammi. He acts in an authoritarian manner in his own strength.

**Sammi** **Sod off! [Exits]**

----- rewind – alternative opening -----

**Pete** *Hi.*

**Sammi** *[Looks up. What does he want? Looks back down to her bucket.]*

**Pete** Could I trouble you for a drink? It's been a long and dusty walk.

**Sammi** *[Looks at Pete sideways. What's his game?]* You're a Jewish man and I'm a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?

**Pete** **Oh, yes. [embarrassed] Sorry. [Exits]**

Pete allows his awkwardness to derail the conversation before it starts.

----- rewind -----

**Pete** Good point. I'm still hot and tired though. Any chance? I won't tell if you won't.

**Sammi** *[Why is he being nice to me?]* Ah, go on. You can use that pot. It'll still be cold.

**Pete** **No, get me fresh water. What's your name, anyway?**

**Sammi** **[I knew it. He's just like the others. She turns away.] None of your damn business! And get your own water. [Exits]**

Sammi reacts negatively. We will understand Sammi better when we know her story. Pete has not spotted the cautious body language. He has not earned her trust and has not made allowance for an unknown background of hurt.

----- rewind -----

**Pete** Thanks. You're a life-saver. I'm Pete, by the way.

**Sammi** Sammi. *[He seems OK]*

**Pete** Good to meet you. Must be hard work lifting all that water in this heat.

**Sammi** Tell me about it! I have to make the morning meal with the dregs of yesterday's water, then work my arse off at the well with the sun blistering down and it's all the fault of those prissy princesses.

**Pete** **Oh Geez! I know what you mean! I can't wait to have a good shower when I get home tonight. And these sandals, look, they've given me blisters and one strap is coming loose and I only got them last week ...**

Pete is distracted, focussed on his own problems and is talking rather than listening.

----- rewind -----

**Pete** I'm not sure I understand.

Sammi Abigail and Becca and that lot. Snooty cows.

**Pete** **Mmm hmm? [When she's answered this, I can come back with a witty remark about how pride goes before a fall.]**

Pete isn't really listening. He's planning his next retort and trying to sound clever.<sup>1</sup>

----- rewind -----

Pete How are they snooty?

Sammi They're the reason I'm pulling up the damn water in the middle of the damn day. Just because a girl likes a good time, they won't let me come in the morning. They say I'm a [finger quotes] "bad influence" on their daughters.

**Pete** **Weeeeell, there's no smoke without fire. What did you do that was so bad? Tell me every juicy detail!**

Being judgemental. Assuming the worst. Prying.

**Sammi** **Who do you think you are, poking your nose into my business! [Exits]**

----- rewind -----

Pete The people of the town don't like you?

Sammi The women don't like me. The men like me well enough [she winks at Pete], you know? [I expect he's only talking to me because he knows my reputation. Better give him what he wants.]

**Pete** **Heh, heh [leans in] I hear you, honey.**

NO! NO! NO! Totally inappropriate!

----- rewind -----

Pete Ah, and that's why the other women are unhappy?

Sammi You got it. But my man is happy and that's all that matters.

**Pete** **Indeed. For it says in Holy Scripture, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." The gospel according to Saint Luke, chapter twelve, verse nineteen.**

Apart from the massive anachronism, Pete's quoting chapter and verse means that Sammi cannot disagree with him. It is a form of bullying.<sup>2</sup> This verse is also out of context and is misleading.

----- rewind -----

Pete Is it?

Sammi [Is being happy all that matters? I'm not sure now. Long pause while Sammi thinks about her life choices.]

**Pete** **Soooo, who are you backing for the World Cup? Do you fancy Argentina or France?<sup>3</sup>**

Pete is embarrassed by the silence and attempts to fill it with inane chatter.

----- rewind -----

Sammi [after a long silence] Ain't you gonna ask?

Pete Ask what?

Sammi Oh, come on. You've heard the gossip. [Maybe he hasn't. He's treating me like I'm human. It's kinda nice.]

<sup>1</sup> This is Bonhoeffer's "impatient, inattentive listening" with "half an ear" that "that despises the brother and is only waiting for a chance to speak." (Bonhoeffer [1939] 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Proof-texting is the worst kind of "superficial platitudes." "People need a listening, compassionate heart more than a talking, intellectual head." (Schramm 2009) See also (Whipp 2013, 'Asymmetries of power')

<sup>3</sup> Never France. They haven't forgiven us for Agincourt.

**Pete** Well, now you mention it, Jemimah down at the coffee shop told me all about you. She said not to tell anyone else, but Martha at the bakers said it was true so ...

Listening to gossip – bad.  
Spreading gossip – bad.  
Breaking confidences – bad.

----- rewind -----

Pete I haven't heard any gossip; I'm not from round here, but is there something you want to talk about?

Sammi *[Looks at her feet]* I called him 'my man', not 'my husband'.  
*[Pause]* It weren't my fault, you know.

**Pete** Phhht! Says you! Hey, joke time. Knock knock. Who's there? Man. Man who? No, HooMan. Human. Geddit?

Disbelief. Invalidating Sammi's feelings.

Wrong time for humour. Also, really bad joke.

----- rewind -----

Pete I never said it was.

Sammi My dad married me off when I was thirteen. Too many girls in the family, apparently.

**Pete** Oh, I know exactly how you feel. The same thing happened to my neighbour's cousin last year.

No, you don't know how she feels. And this conversation is about Sammi, not your neighbour's cousin.

----- rewind -----

Pete I see.

Sammi He was more than twice my age, and he hit me.

Pete It must have been a hard time.

Sammi Yeah. *[Sigh]* Yeah, it was. I stuck it for three years then I ran away. But my dad wouldn't have me back in the house, so I had to get married again ...

**Pete** Really? Now if I'd been you, I'd have ...

Interrupting. Giving un-asked-for advice.<sup>4</sup> And you are not her, so we don't need to know what you'd have done.

----- rewind -----

Sammi ... and he was just as bad as the first. I hit him back once and he chucked me out. Right then. Middle of the night, and I was wandering the street with just the clothes on my back.

**Pete** God hates divorce. You should have stayed with your first husband. He only hit you because you didn't pray hard enough for him to stop.

What? NO! Safeguarding is everybody's business. Sammi is vulnerable and needs protecting. Don't blame the victim and don't blame God.

----- rewind -----

*[weeps silently]* A nice guy at the local tavern took me in. I married his son and worked there. It wasn't bad, actually. Probably the best home I've had. But the son died. He was never very strong, and the mother blamed me and said I was after her husband. I wasn't, but and she threw me out anyway.

At least I got to take my stuff with me that time. *[watery smile]* And Solly, that's the husband, he gave me some money to get myself started in life. I think he felt guilty for what his wife had said about me. It weren't true, but mud sticks, you know?

<sup>4</sup> Pete has not followed "Listen, listen, listen, then listen some more before taking action or giving advice." (Allen E. Ivey 1997, 6)

**Pete** *[Looks at his watch. I only wanted a cup of water, not her life story.] Fascinating. Thanks for the story.*

Closing down the conversation. Making Sammi feel unimportant and that she's wasting his time.

**Sammi** *[Noticing Pete's bored expression.] Yeah, anyway. Gotta go. [Exits]*

----- rewind -----

**Pete** Yes, it does.

**Sammi** I got myself a little tavern with the money. Did alright. Got myself couple more husbands too. Both deadbeats.

**Pete** Sorry to hear that. And how is life now?

**Sammi** Now I'm with a guy who's married to some rich old bat. They can't stand each other but he can't divorce her cos her dad owns the vineyard he works in.

**Pete** **Ah! The evils of capitalism. I happen to be the union rep of Vinedressers and Tillage Workers Amalgamated. You should come to our meetings.**

Pete has got side-tracked onto his own agenda.

----- rewind -----

**Pete** I see.

**Sammi** *[Why did I just tell him all that? I've never told anyone before. Not even my sisters.]* Are you some kind of prophet?

**Pete** What do you think?

**Sammi** Alright, Mr Prophet. Here's one for you. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews say we should worship in Jerusalem. Which is it?

**Pete** **You Samaritans are totally in the wrong. You need to repent of your syncretistic abominations and ... [theology lecture follows]**

Sammi is trying to avoid the difficult topic and Pete has followed her detour.<sup>5</sup> He is alienating her and being critical of her culture. He is displaying his superior learning and making her feel inferior.

**Sammi** Eh, what?

----- rewind -----

**Pete** It's a good question, Sammi, and maybe we can talk about that later, but is it what's important right now?

**Sammi** I suppose not. Y'know, it's helped a lot, saying all that. It was kind of knotted up in my chest. This isn't who I am, really. It all just ... happened. People give you a bad name and you live up to it, you know?

**Pete** People might give you a bad name, but I don't think God does.

**Sammi** Hmmn, you're right. I think ... I think I know what I need to do.

**Pete** That sounds positive.

**Sammi** Yeah. I'm gonna tell Amos to go back to his old bat, and I'm gonna sell up and start again in a new village, where I ain't got a bad rep. I'll run a nice, respectable tavern and get my mum and my sisters over to help. And my dad can get stuffed. *[Exits, with a spring in her step]*

<sup>5</sup> Point 7 of Tennant et al.'s useful list. All the other items are also featured in Pete's errors. (Tennant, Long and Toney-Butler 2022)

## Take 2

Scene: A hot, dusty market square at midday. The square is deserted except for Sammi, a woman in her late twenties, drawing water from a well. She is wearing a red gown tied with a fringed scarf and her black hair hangs loose about her shoulders.

Enter Pete, a man in his early thirties. His beard and hair are unkempt, and his robe is dirty from the road. He looks around for shade but seeing none, he ambles to the well and sits heavily on the parapet. He nods at Sammi, who looks away.

Pete	<i>[She's vulnerable and I'm in a position of power. I need to tread softly here. God, please help me to be who she needs today. May I be the pipe through which flows your living water.<sup>6</sup>] Hi.</i>	Aware of social dynamics. Servant-hearted. Allowing Sammi to control the depth of interaction while inviting conversation. Involves God in the interaction.
Sammi	<i>[Looks up. What does he want? Looks back down to her bucket.]</i>	
Pete	Could I trouble you for a drink? It's been a long and dusty walk.	
Sammi	<i>[Looks at Pete sideways. What's his game?]</i> You're a Jewish man and I'm a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?	
Pete	Good point. I'm still hot and tired though. Any chance? I won't tell if you won't.	Acknowledging validity of her argument. <sup>7</sup> Making points of contact, friendly and approachable.
Sammi	<i>[Why is he being nice to me?]</i> Ah, go on. You can use that pot. It'll still be cold.	
Pete	Thanks. You're a life-saver. <i>[This water's good]</i> I'm Pete, by the way.	Genuinely meaning what he says. Pete volunteers information and allows Sammi to reciprocate if she wishes.
Sammi	Sammi. <i>[He seems OK]</i>	
Pete	Good to meet you. Must be hard work lifting all that water in this heat.	Empathises with her situation. <sup>8</sup>
Sammi	Tell me about it! I have to make the morning meal with the dregs of yesterday's water, then work my arse off at the well with the sun blistering down and it's all the fault of those prissy princesses.	Seeking clarification. Inviting further talk without being pushy.
Pete	<i>[Hmmm, that caught a raw nerve.]</i> I'm not sure I understand.	
Sammi	Abigail and Becca and that lot. Snooty cows.	Open, 'how' question.
Pete	How are they snooty?	
Sammi	They're the reason I'm pulling up the damn water in the middle of the damn day. Just because a girl likes a good time, they won't let me come in the morning. They say I'm a <i>[finger quotes]</i> "bad influence" on their daughters.	
Pete	<i>[This hurts her more than she's showing.]</i> The people of the town don't like you?	Being aware of what is unsaid. Clarifying, reflecting back Sammi's comments.

<sup>6</sup> "What the Church needs is fresh spring water, even if it flows through a wooden pipe." Gregory of Nyssa.

<sup>7</sup> Sparto and Bloch list the characteristics of Active Listening as "inquiry, reflection, respect, and empathy." (Spartaro and Bloch 2018) Here, Pete demonstrates respect.

<sup>8</sup> Using small talk as a basis for big talk. (Knapp 1978)

- Sammi The women don't like me. The men like me well enough [*she winks at Pete*], you know? [*I expect he's only talking to me because he knows my reputation. Better give him what he wants.*]
- Pete [*Pointedly ignoring the flirting*] Ah, and that's why the other women are unhappy?
- Sammi You got it. But my man is happy and that's all that matters.
- Pete [*Pause*] Is it?
- Sammi [*Is being happy all that matters? I'm not sure now. Long pause while Sammi thinks about her life choices.*]
- Pete [*silently prays and reflects on his own reactions and feelings*]
- Sammi [*after a long silence*] Ain't you gonna ask?
- Pete [*She sounds fearful. She has been hurt by men, and I'm a man, so I probably represent a threat to her. She has been condemned and is expecting me to condemn her. What do I think about her situation? I must be careful not to let my background and situation colour my reactions.*] Ask what?
- Sammi Oh, come on. You've heard the gossip. [*Maybe he hasn't. He's treating me like I'm human. It's kinda nice.*]
- Pete I haven't heard any gossip; I'm not from round here, but is there something you want to talk about?
- Sammi [*Looks at her feet*] I called him 'my man', not 'my husband'. [*Pause*] It weren't my fault, you know.
- Pete [*Soft, kind voice*] I never said it was. [*He matches her clasped hands*]<sup>11</sup>
- Sammi My dad married me off when I was thirteen. Too many girls in the family, apparently.
- Pete I see. [*God, be with us in this conversation.*]
- Sammi He was more than twice my age, and he hit me.
- Pete [*Nodding*] It must have been a hard time.
- Sammi Yeah. [*Sigh*] Yeah, it was. I stuck it for three years then I ran away. But my dad wouldn't have me back in the house, so I had to get married again and he was just as bad as the first. I hit him back once and he chucked me out. Right then. Middle of the night, and I was wandering the street with just the clothes on my back.
- [*weeps silently*] A nice guy at the local tavern took me in. I married his son and worked there. It wasn't bad, actually. Probably the best home

Not embarrassing Sammi, but making boundaries clear.

Sensitive to the opportunity to deepen the conversation. Is Sammi wanting to talk about the men in her life?

Pete does not break the silence.

Fearful of condemnation.

Reflexive self-awareness of the effect of the observer on the observed. Setting aside his needs.<sup>9</sup>

Assuring Sammi that she is not pre-judged. Acknowledging there is something that needs unloading. Inviting Sammi to talk if she wants.

This is a major admission. This is a serious moment.<sup>10</sup>

More reassurance. Plenty will be needed.

"I'm listening." Remembering that God is present.

Validating

<sup>9</sup> "Listening means letting go of a part of yourself and entering the frame of another. It is a deeply sacrificial act." (Courtney 2021) Pete places his thoughts, opinions and curiosity below Sammi's need to be heard.

<sup>10</sup> Sammi is wanting to confess and needs someone to exercise the ministry of "Priestly Listening". (Osmer 2008, 31)

<sup>11</sup> A small amount of posture matching can show attentiveness and empathy. "We convey to others the genuineness of our interest, not by earnest-sounding enquiries, but by the responsive demeanour of our eyes and face, by the quality of our closeness and our posture." (Whipp 2013, 'Active Listening')

I've had. But the son died. He was never very strong, and the mother blamed me and said I was after her husband. I wasn't, but and she threw me out anyway.

At least I got to take my stuff with me that time. *[watery smile]* And Solly, that's the husband, he gave me some money to get myself started in life. I think he felt guilty for what his wife had said about me. It weren't true, but mud sticks, you know?

Pete Yes, it does.

Sammi I got myself a little tavern with the money. Did alright. Got myself couple more husbands too. Both deadbeats.

Pete Sorry to hear that. And how is life now?

Sammi Now I'm with a guy who's married to some rich old bat. They can't stand each other but he can't divorce her cos her dad owns the vineyard he works in.

Pete I see.

Sammi *[Why did I just tell him all that? I've never told anyone before. Not even my sisters.]* Are you some kind of prophet?

Pete What do you think?

Sammi Alright, Mr Prophet. Here's one for you. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews say we should worship in Jerusalem. Which is it?

Pete It's a good question, Sammi, and maybe we can talk about that later, but is it what's important right now?

Sammi I suppose not. Y'know, it's helped a lot, saying all that. It was kind of knotted up in my chest. This isn't who I am, really. It all just ... happened. People give you a bad name and you live up to it, you know?

Pete *[It sounds like Sammi is feeling trapped. She needs a way out]* People might give you a bad name, but I don't think God does.

Sammi Hmmn, you're right. I think ... I think I know what I need to do.

Pete That sounds positive.

Sammi Yeah. I'm gonna tell Amos to go back to his old bat, and I'm gonna sell up and start again in a new village, where I ain't got a bad rep. I'll run a nice, respectable tavern and get my mum and my sisters over to help. And my dad can get stuffed. *[Exits, with a spring in her step]*

Pete *[Watches her go. Dials up 'Pastoral Cycle' on the washing machine of his mind and goes through the encounter with God, learning and growing.]*

Pete is silent and lets Sammi talk.<sup>12</sup> He has anachronistic tissues to hand so that she doesn't feel embarrassed about her drippy nose.

Affirming, Validating.

Not revealing his opinions or views. Letting her tell her story.

Reflecting her questions back. Pete's opinions are not important here. Sammi's are.

Pete has spotted that this is an attempt to avoid the difficult stuff and steers her gently back. Be sensitive to when people have had enough, but don't get distracted.

Sensitive to the words between the words. Allowing Sammi to find her own solutions.

Encouraging Sammi to move forward with her own agenda.

<sup>12</sup> This is what Osman calls "a spirituality of presence ... a spiritual orientation of attending to others in their particularity and otherness within the presence of God." (Osmer 2008, 33-34)



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