

"Overcoming Failure," Part 3 - Simon Peter Falls

Luke 22:54-62

Failure can be a very discouraging thing, especially if we continue to fail in the same area time after time. However, failure can be one of the greatest teaching tools that we have if we learn from it. In our last lesson we learned about the warning of Jesus concerning Simon Peter's denial. Despite what Jesus said Peter was insistent that Jesus was wrong and that he could not do such a thing. In fact, he said that he would die before he would deny his Lord. As we read Luke's account of this story, we see that Peter's conceit and self-confidence got the best of him. He learned the hard way that what Jesus says is always true and right and he learned it by his own personal experience.

Haven't we done that same thing? We have all lived with the assumption that the words of Jesus are true, but they will have no personal affect or consequence on our lives. We have all been examples of hearing the truth of God's word, then denying the truth of it by rebelling against it by the way we have lived. In doing so we have become living testimonies that what the Lord says, He means, and it will one day come to pass. Simon Peter did not have to experience failure to believe what Jesus said, he could have just believed him in the first place and been much better off. On the other hand, we can be sure that the words of Jesus served as a reminder of the truth and served as a precaution whenever He heard them again.

So, it is with us; we all have personal examples of failure despite our knowledge of the truth. Some of us have more than others depending on how far we have pushed the patience of God. Yes, our sin is against God, but it is equally important to know that when we sin against God we are sinning against His word and His word is truth. Peter should have done what we all should do; he should have obeyed what he heard from Jesus. We always have the opportunity, despite the temptations, to obey what we already know.

As we continue to see how this story unfolds, we hope to learn from what took place in Simon Peter's life and perhaps see some similarities in our own lives. We have an amazing opportunity to see what Peter may have been able to do differently and when we see some of these things our goal will be to apply these things to our lives in order to resist the temptation of denying our Lord.

Luke 22:54-62 - Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. 55 And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. 56 But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. 57 And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. 58 And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. 59 And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaeen. 60 And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet

spake, the rooster crew. 61 And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the rooster crows, thou shalt deny me thrice. 62 And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

1. Verse 54 - The distance factor. Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off.

Falling always has a beginning. In most cases it is easily detected when we look back and retrace our steps to see where we went wrong. When we look back there are times when the details might be different as we compare one fall from another. However, there is one thing that we might conclude that all of them have in common, they all began by our thinking. There were things that may not have yet been carried out, but those things were thought about for a short time, or a long time and the plan was executed.

As we noted before, Simon Peter's thoughts began to get the best of him when he denied that he could ever be guilty of denying his Lord. However, his actions soon began to conflict with his words when he followed Jesus. Prior to this he followed close to Him but now he followed Him "afar off." In other words, he was beginning to distance himself from Jesus. Perhaps he felt that if he followed from far away, he might be away from the danger of experiencing the same things as his Master. As the story unfolds, we will see that he may have been more concerned with his reputation than he was concerned with his association.

The Application:

- One way for us to detect the closeness of a fall is when we can detect the distance we are from the Lord.
- It is by our personal effort that we stay close to the Lord, He will not move, and it is in our best interest, if we move, to move closer to Him and not farther from him.

James 4:8a - Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

Psalms 73:28 - But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.

These two verses give us two very encouraging things to consider when we think of staying close to God. The first (**James 4:8a**) speaks to us concerning God's invitation for us to draw near to Him and the second (**Psalms 73:28**) speaks of the benefit of doing so...."it is good for us." So, we see when we reject the invitation by our carelessness, we will eventually reap the consequences for doing so.

There is something else we see in this verse that can really help us. When Simon Peter was following "afar off" he was alone and out of the company of his brothers in Christ. Yes, they had all scattered like

Jesus said they would, but despite that they should have valued the company of one another at such a low time in their lives.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 - Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify (to build up) one another, even as also ye do.

For our learning:

- Removing ourselves from the people of God can eventually distance us from God Himself.
- We read nowhere in the Bible about lone wolf Christianity.

2. Verse 55 - Far from Him, close to them. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.

When Peter should have been by his Master's side or in the fellowship of his brothers in Christ he was now in the camp of the enemy. As the high priest's servants had kindled a fire Peter decided it would be better to try and blend in with them than to stand up for Jesus. Just a little time ago Jesus told him and the two other disciples to "watch and pray that they enter not into temptation." He was noted in Matthew's gospel telling them that "the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41)". Now, Peter is beginning to experience the reality of that instruction as he hopes that he will not be detected.

Jesus had given this instruction two times when they were in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is obvious that Peter had not been watching, he had been warming his hands. He had not been praying- he must have felt that he was too strong to devote himself to special prayer for a matter that he thought he could face on his own. As we will see, he wasn't prepared for what he would face, and neither will we if we do not heed the instruction to "watch and pray".

The Application:

- When you stray too far from the good fire, you will always find yourself warming your hands by a bad fire.

1 Corinthians 15:33 - Be not deceived, evil communications corrupts good manners.

Ephesians 5:11 - And have no fellowship (to become a partaker together with others) with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove (expose) them.

3. Verses 56,57 - The truth comes out. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. 57 And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not.

The first of three times Peter is confronted with being a follower of Jesus is by one of the young ladies. She looked at him as he sat there by the fire and concluded that he had been with Jesus. Perhaps it was because he was a stranger, and she had never seen him around there before. Or perhaps she had made her way on occasion to the Temple where she heard Jesus speak and saw Peter and the other disciples accompany Him. Whatever the reason was, she felt confident that she was right and what Peter should have taken as a compliment he instead tried to keep a secret.

It would be an understatement to say that coming out of a lifestyle that is entangled by addiction can be very challenging. In every case it must include the removing of ourselves from one environment and placing ourselves in other environments. Since meeting Jesus for the first time Simon Peter had experienced many new things in his new life with the Lord. He was growing and changing like all of us should be or could be. But when he tried to go back and blend the new with the old he found that he could no longer try to fit his new life into the old life and neither can we.

The Application:

- It is quite a compliment to be called out as a follower of Jesus. Unless of course we are called out when we are in the wrong place doing the wrong thing.....then it goes from compliment to conviction.

4. Verses 58-60a - More confirmation and more lies. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. 59 And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean. 60a And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest.

Verse 58 says that "after a little while another saw him". He is given another chance to stand up while he is tempted again to deny Christ. After about one hour he once again is given the choice that he had been given two times prior. Each time it seemed as if there was more and more confidence from his accusers and each time Peter held his ground and stayed with his deception.

What an amazing truth that we see in this story of the scandalous objective of Satan and how he thrusts his methodical assault upon anyone that will buy into his trickery. Each time he came after Peter with a temptation to deny his Lord, when Peter gave in to that temptation Satan came with another one right behind it until one of his blows would be the crushing one. We are told that when we resist the Devil, he will flee from us, but we will never be strong enough to do so unless we are first following the instruction that enables us to resist him. With God's help, always resist the first temptation and you will strengthen yourself for the one that might be right on its heels.

James 4:7 - Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

The Application:

- Never think that you are strong enough in your own strength to stand toe to toe and exchange blows with the devil.
- We do not defend ourselves with clever slogans that we saw on a bumper sticker or were developed by some clever philosophical mumbo jumbo thinker. "Thus saith the Lord" will always be our greatest defense.

2 Corinthians 10:3,4 - For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (fleshly, governed by mere human nature not by the Spirit of God) but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,

Peter went through his agonizing false attempt to blend in with the enemy while keeping his distance from the Lord until he was noticed. Notice that he was found out, not because he gave in. He held on to his deception as long as he could, and it did not end until Jesus brought it to a end. Three times he was given the chance to come clean and three times he rejected the opportunity. Three times he could have stood up for Jesus and three times his pride got the best of him, and he held his ground.

Simon Peter's mind must have been spinning. His emotions, we might think, were stretched far greater than ever before. He had taken the rejection of Jesus to a level that he had said he would never take it and he found himself guilty of the thing that he said he would never do. He had no one to blame but himself and now he was all alone to deal with his failure....or so he may have thought.

What we learn when we read the Bible is that we have the advantage of seeing things from other perspectives. This can help us to learn how we may have done things a little differently than the people did that we have read about. We can all look back at times in our lives, if given the chance to do things differently, we might have done so. As we look at Simon Peter's circumstances, we have already noted that he would have been better off staying closer to Jesus, and he would certainly have been better off had he not set off on his own. That being the case, I would mention a few other things that we can see that can help us when we are tempted to drift away from God rather than draw near to God.

- **Two looked at Simon Peter and one listened to him.**

There is a word of encouragement from what might seem like a bleak situation. Although Peter had been found in the wrong place at the wrong time at least he still had been accused of being different than the crowd he was around. Change is evidence based; either it is taking place, or it is not taking place. In this case at least Simon Peter had experienced enough change that he seemed a little different and perhaps he sounded a little different in addition to the difference in his dialect.

However, his flesh got the best of him when he had been accused for the last time. The account in Mark's gospel tells us that Peter began **"to curse and to swear"** that he did not know Jesus (**Mark 14:71**).

The Application:

- What we are experiencing on the inside will always in some way manifest itself on the outside.
- Rehearsing the truth comes naturally because it happened; rewriting the truth is difficult because it really didn't happen, or it didn't happen that way.

Matthew 12:34 - O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

- **Instead of making something right, he made something worse.**

It was not necessarily the third time that Peter denied the Lord that so-called confirmed his failure. The third time simply confirmed what Jesus said to be true; that before the rooster crowed Peter would deny Him three times. However, it was the giving in to the first temptation that opened the door to the next two temptations. He had the opportunity, and so do we, to resist the first temptation and if he had not resisted, to repent of the first offence in order that it might help him avoid committing the next two.

The Application:

- When we mess up the first thing that we should do is make it right with God. Acknowledge to God that you have sinned and ask Him to forgive you.
- Repentance will always give us the opportunity to start over instead of sliding into habitual sin that can only make things worse.
- When we have failed, we will always be able to retrace our steps and see the people and/or circumstances God used in an attempt to keep us from falling.

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

One the most amazing things we see in this story is how patiently merciful the Lord is when He is dealing with us. The Lord allowed three separate opportunities for a way of escape prior to Simon Peter's ultimate fall. The Lord was trying to help him out of his sin while Simon Peter plunged further into his sin. Knowing this, we should now be more sensitive to God's way of escape than we are to our plan to indulge.

- **We must deny ourselves or we are bound to deny our Lord.**

Matthew 16:24 - Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Many people have heard this verse and perhaps many have committed it to memory. Maybe you have read the writings of James and learned that hearing and doing are completely different things. We are instructed not to do the one without doing the other (**James 1:22**). Memorizing scripture is one of the most beneficial things that we can do as Christians, but if we do not learn to understand how to make good use of what we know we are missing one of the great benefits for doing so.

In other words, as we see in this verse there is an expectation for us to deny ourselves. Anyone with a little bit of smarts can see that by reading the verse. But the best thing for us to do, since we are responsible to live up to this expectation, is to find out how we might do so in order that we deny ourselves and not deny our Lord.

Several things that we see:

If we accept the responsibility, it will be by our willingness to do so. If any man *will* come after me...

Like all other things that we are instructed to do in the Christian life, we deny ourselves *voluntarily*. However, just because we deny ourselves voluntarily does not always mean that it is something that we are always going to want to do. It is the sacrificial giving up of what I want for myself and the giving into what God wants from me. When we consider this thought of "coming after God" we can see that it obviously involves action on our part. It is something that we make a conscious effort to do so it becomes what we "want" to do.

Jesus said that if we are going to be His disciples it will be a deliberate choice of our own. The word disciple means to be a follower of a teacher and in this sense, we are clearly talking about following Christ. Sadly, many people are followers by the will of others rather than any act of their own will and this, in part, this is why they do not follow for very long. There is at least one easy way to determine whether or not I am "coming after God".....by looking at some of the other things in my life that I might be running after far more often.

We must deny ourselves. let him deny himself

To say we deny ourselves seems far easier than to deny ourselves in practice. It is not something that we do one time, and we are done with it. It is the daily resisting of the appetites of our flesh for the benefit of the soul. It is resisting what we sometimes really want when God insists that we turn away from it. It is the daily discipline of learning what God wants for me and resisting those things those things that He would have me give up. Jesus Christ is our greatest example when we see His prayer to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane.

Luke 22:42 - Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

We would never think in His humanity that Jesus had any genuine desire to die on a cross. In other words, as a man we can be sure that He was not looking forward to the pain, suffering and humiliation that would accompany His death on the cross. But He denied Himself and **"became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"** (Philippians 2:8).

Denying ourselves includes that we deny ourselves of things that we want and do the things that God wants. Perhaps one way of detecting whether or not we are living this out is to see all of what we are getting for ourselves and all of what, if any, we are sacrificing for God.

Titus 1:16 - They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

In **Titus 1:16** Paul gives us a description of how the denying of God is manifested in the lives of some who **"profess that they know God."** He tells us that there are many that profess to know God, and yet in their lives and their words they deny and reject Him. In other words, what they practice is in contradiction to what they proclaim.

The Bible has much to say about the person that lives in such a way. We have all been guilty of and have witnessed in the lives of others various levels of hypocrisy. There may not be anything more damaging and distasteful in the life of the church than this matter of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is saying one thing and doing another, it is to describe ourselves in one way and living another way. It is to make a false claim to or pretence of having admirable principles, beliefs, or feelings. One of the ways that hypocrisy is revealed is when we turn around and do what we criticize others of doing.

We must take up our cross. Take up his cross.

The troubles of Christians are rightfully called **crosses**. Oswald Chambers said, "The cross is the pain involved in doing the will of God." Every Christian has a cross and sometimes has more to bear than just one. Just as each of us has a work to do for the Lord, each of us has a cross to bear for Him as well. In God's infinite wisdom, our cross is divinely appointed for us and is best fit for us. God knows what we can bear and when we bear it His way and, in His time, our cross will be part of our growth and maturity as believers.

When we take up our cross, we are managing the God-ordained afflictions in our lives with His help. Any cross that any of us are currently called to bear is for our good and perhaps for the good of others. We are not to look at our cross as only our burden but instead to look at them as our opportunities to allow God to work in and through our lives. However, if we ignore that they are there or excuse ourselves from

the responsibility of them; it might only lead to them being less likely to be lifted while giving way to receiving more.

One way to view our cross is since our Lord would count us worthy to experience affliction that it might make us better. To think that God would pay enough attention to me that He might allow affliction in my life in order to make me less of what I have been and more of what He wants me to be is not something that I would ask for but is in fact a privilege in the highest degree. We know that **"all things work together for good to those that love God and to those who are called according to His purpose"**.

The Application:

- When we see our cross by knowing that God has a greater purpose for my affliction will make all the difference in how we live with or overcome our afflictions.
- The crosses that we have carried in the past can be used by God to help someone else carry theirs in the present.
- Our cross will not always make sense but can always produce fruit.

The key for every Christian. And follow Me.

Sometimes in the Christian life the simplest things can be the most challenging. Such a simple instruction....**"Follow Me"**....and such a lack of consistency, is where many of us find ourselves today. We must keep in mind the context in which Jesus spoke these words. He is saying, "When you are carrying your cross, which each of you will be called to carry....remember that while you are doing that, remember to follow Me".

What an amazing truth that we see here. When we are "taking up our cross" we are at that time, following Jesus. When we take it up His way and, in His time, we are then living out His instruction to "follow Him." If we don't follow, we won't carry, if we won't carry, we won't learn and if we won't learn we stack up more crosses.

5. Verses 60b - The rooster crows. And immediately, while he yet spake, the rooster crew.

Who would have ever thought that the sound of a rooster crowing would confirm the truth of the words of Jesus? Peter had not even gotten his third denial out of his mouth before the rooster began to crow. Perhaps he cringed with expectation knowing what Jesus told him as he awaited the sound that he knew would follow. Or perhaps in his mind there was some thought of the possibility that the rooster would not crow, and the Lord was not accurate in his prediction. Whatever it was that he was thinking, he found out the hard way that what Jesus says Jesus means.

Simon Peter reached the place where so many of us have reached. He reached the place where he ended up doing something that he said that he would not do. In fact, he said that he would sooner die than deny

his Lord. The ultimate defeat, the ultimate failure...when we repeat the same failure time after time. In doing so, we often think, "will I ever get the victory over the things that I am so accustomed to failing in"?

The Application:

- Every reminder of failure is also a reminder of our opportunity to make it right with God.
- We are prone to failure; God is ready to forgive!

Psalm 86:5 - For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.

6. Verse 61 - The Lord turns and looks and Peter remembers. 61 And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the rooster crows, thou shalt deny me thrice.

To say that there may have been a flood of emotion in Peter's heart might be an understatement. The thing that he may have feared the most is now thrust upon him. He denies the Lord, the rooster crows and as he turns and looks, Jesus turns and looks at him. But when we notice what the Bible does NOT say we have a great deal to be encouraged in terms of what it does say. It does not say that Jesus turned and looked away from him; it says that Jesus "**turned and looked upon him.**"

In spite of all that we may have done, and may still do, we are never out of the watchful eye of the Lord. His look "**upon Peter**" may have seemed like a terrible thing but a look away from Peter would have been far worse. The question we might ask is, what kind of look might that have been from Jesus when He looked upon Peter? We really do not know exactly how to answer that question, but we can consider what may have been behind the look and make an application of what could have been.

- **It must have been a persuasive look.**

Peter had just said that he did not know Jesus and Jesus turned and looked at him as if to say, "You do not know Me? Look at Me and tell Me that you do not know Me." We can be confident that Jesus, for Peter's own good, made sure that he knew that Jesus heard and saw him deny Him.

- **It must have been a sympathetic look.**

Of all the looks we may consider that it could have been we can be sure that whatever it was, it included a look of compassion. Jesus knew how weak Peter's heart was and He also knew how much he needed His help. A look of compassion helps to take the sting out of failure. It does not eliminate the pain but it sure can relieve a great deal of it.

Jesus was not a stranger to compassion. Many times, we read in the gospels how He looked at someone or a group of people and the Bible says that **“He had compassion on them.”** Each time we read of Him being compassionate we also read of Him giving an invitation to anyone that was in need to reach out and give Him a chance to meet that need or relieve them of their suffering.

- **It must have been an important look.**

It indicated the offer of grace to Peter's heart that enabled him to repent. When the rooster crowed, that did not bring him to repentance. That was simply an outward means of reminding him of his sin. But power went along with the look that would change Peter's heart and bring him to leave his sin and weep over it.

The Application:

- Always remember that despite the way things may look, the compassion of Jesus Christ is a constant. Perhaps He has allowed things to get as bad as they are or as bad as they have been in order that we turn to Him while He is turned toward us.
- Whenever the Lord chooses to use the circumstances of life to draw our attention to Him, it is not only to draw us from our sin but to also lead us to repent of it.
- Failure can often give birth to a purpose.

7. Verse 62 – Simon Peter breaks. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

One look from Jesus and the heart of Simon Peter was melted to tears of godly sorrow. It was the look from Jesus and the grace of Almighty God that brought Peter back to right standing with the Lord. Although he did not realize it until after the resurrection of Christ, he had been restored.

We can learn many things from this story, but one thing stands out. The failures of Simon Peter lead to him denying Jesus. But just because he was down, he was far from out if he would choose to allow the Lord to restore him to future usefulness. When we surrender to failure instead of learning from failure, we will never experience the purpose the Lord has for allowing us to go through it.