

## INTRODUCTION

Today we're going to talk about how Peter denied the Lord. He was a failure. This is a message about failure. So if you have never failed you are welcome to leave now. But if you've ever failed, God has a word for you today.

Let me tell you the true story of Walter. He grew up in a very dysfunctional family with a domineering father. He and his three brothers all ran away before the age of 16. Walter lied about his age so he could join the army. After the army, Walter started a business at age 22 in Kansas City, but it failed and the company went into bankruptcy. With only \$40 to his name he moved to California to try to become an actor. But he never made it. He and his brother Roy started an animation service, but never gained rights to their drawings, so they lost ownership of their art.

Walter suffered what he described as a "heck of a breakdown" but he refused to give up. He had the idea to draw a cartoon mouse he would name Mortimer Mouse. Walter's wife, Lillian, suggested a better name would be Mickey Mouse. So Mickey Mouse was born in 1928, but Walt Disney still faced more failure. After producing several movies and cartoons, his company was \$4 million in debt and business was slow. He had a dream to build a theme park in California called Disneyland, but he had no money. Walt was depressed and having a hard time dealing with stress. He took a chance on a new medium called television, The Mickey Mouse Club, Davy Crockett, and the Wonderful World of Color. Finally things turned around and Disneyland opened in 1955. Walt had a dream of Disney World in a swampy area near a little town called Orlando. Walt died in 1966 at age 65 before Disney World opened. Today the Walt Disney Company is worth \$130 billion.

Walt Disney experienced several episodes of failure, but he never gave up. In this message we're going to look at huge failure in the life of Simon Peter. We're going to see that he didn't allow his failure to become final or fatal.

When we finished last week, Jesus was being arrested. He was taken to the House of Caiaphas to be put on trial. We know exactly where that is today, and I've visited it dozens of times.

John 18:15-18. "Simon Peter was following Jesus, as was another disciple. That disciple was an acquaintance of the high priest; so he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard. But Peter remained standing outside by the door. So the other disciple, the one known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the girl who was the doorkeeper and brought Peter in. Then the servant girl who was the doorkeeper said to Peter, 'You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?' 'I am not,' he said. Now the servants and the officials had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold. They were standing there warming themselves, and Peter was standing with them, warming himself."

The next few verses describe Jesus' questioning by the High Priest. We pick up Peter's story in verse 25.

John 18:25-27. "Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him, 'You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.' One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said, 'Didn't I see you with him in the garden?' Peter denied it again. Immediately a rooster crowed."

Have you ever denied the Lord? I know I have. I have failed to confess Jesus many times. Probably my worst denial was when I was a sophomore in high school and a friend asked me why my family and I went to church. Although I knew the Lord, I wasn't living for Him at that time, so I was embarrassed. And I said, "Oh, I just go to church because my parents make me." I didn't realize at the time that my friend was asking about God. Sadly, he died that year in a car wreck, and I don't know that he ever trusted Jesus. I can relate to Simon Peter. Can you?

So how does a follower of Jesus get to the place where they deny the Lord? But more importantly, how does a follower of Jesus recover after spiritual failure? That's what we're going to talk about in this message.

## **1. THE STEPS TO DENIAL**

Simon Peter was a leader among the twelve disciples. He was one of the first disciples Jesus called, and after Jesus ascended back into heaven, he was one of the leaders of the early church. However, imagine that night when Peter was sitting around the fire at the house of Caiaphas. He was brave enough to follow the mob that arrested Jesus, but he was too afraid to identify himself as a companion of Jesus. While outside that night, Peter was asked three times if he knew Jesus. And three times he denied Jesus. When we look at Peter's life, we can see there were at least three steps on the downward path of failure. We need to know these steps, because they are the same steps of denial followers of Jesus take today.

### **(1) Disagreement with God's Word**

A few months earlier, Jesus had taken the disciples on a retreat up to the very northern border of Israel at Caesarea Philippi. One of His main objectives was to reveal to the disciples that He would be crucified in Jerusalem. But Peter disagreed with this plan.

"From then on Jesus began to point out to his disciples that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, 'Oh no, Lord! This will never happen to you!' Jesus turned and told Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me because you're not thinking about God's concerns but human concerns.'" (Matthew 16:21-23 CSB)

Peter heard the words straight from the mouth of Jesus, but He just couldn't accept the truth. The same thing can happen to believers today. A Christian doesn't just wake up one day and start denying the Lord. It usually begins when they neglect to get into the Bible. And then it gets worse when they begin to disagree with parts of the Bible.

So I want to challenge you to daily get into the Word of God. Read it, live it, obey it. If you stop reading and obeying God's Word you will drift away from the Lord. And we never drift toward holiness we drift toward unfaithfulness. We never drift toward obedience, we drift toward disobedience. That's why it's important for us to align our lives with God's Word. You can't do that unless you read it, obey it, and live it.

## **(2) Overconfidence**

When Jesus predicted that all the disciples would leave him, Peter bragged that he would stick with Jesus. He said, "All these other turkeys may fly away, but I'll stand by you whatever happens!"

But Jesus said, "Peter, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said, "Never! Not me, Lord!"

In John 13:37 we read, "Lord," Peter asked, "why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus replied, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly I tell you, a rooster will not crow until you have denied me three times."

Pride is hard to admit. I once heard a Catholic Priest say that in thirty years of hearing confession, he couldn't recall a single person confessing the sin of pride. Pride is a condition that blinds the person who has it.

Pride is an attitude that causes you to think you are incapable of sin. But we need to understand that any of us are capable of denying the Lord at any time. We must guard against the overconfident attitude that we will never fail the Lord. The Bible says in Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction; and an arrogant spirit before a fall."

## **(3) Peer pressure from the wrong crowd**

Peter sat and warmed himself at the fire with those who were hostile toward Jesus. It's hard to stand up and confess Jesus when you are with people who don't share your beliefs. We read in Mark 14:54 that Peter followed Jesus at a distance to the courtyard of Caiaphas' house. That's an indication that we find ourselves in trouble when we don't follow the Lord closely. Some of you may have at one time followed the Lord closely, but you have hung back and now you follow the Lord at a distance. And before long you find yourself hanging out with the wrong crowd. Soon you find yourself doing the wrong thing.

Falling away from the Lord doesn't happen overnight. It happens gradually over a period of time. I've always loved the words on the first psalm that talk about the characteristics of a righteous person. It starts by revealing what a righteous person *doesn't* do. Notice the progression. Psalm 1:1 says, "How happy is the one who does not WALK in the advice of the wicked or STAND in the pathway with sinners or SIT in the company of mockers!"

Peter found himself walking with the wrong crowd. Then he stood with them, and then he sat down by the fire with them. If you find yourself walking with the wrong crowd, turn around. Don't stand, and then for sure, don't sit down with them.

Peer pressure is powerful, especially among young people. But adults feel the pressure also. Everyone wants to be accepted by the crowd.

In South Alabama, where I grew up, I was never offered pot; because a pot was something you cooked turnip greens in. But I can remember as an eighth grader sitting in a car with high school boys and being offered a swig of a room-temperature can of Budweiser. I took a swig of it and it tasted awful, but I said it was delicious because I thought it made me appear cool. That's peer pressure.

Mark adds the detail that one of the people around the fire was a servant girl. "You're one of his disciples!" Peter said, "I am NOT!" A second person said, "Yes you are, you are one of the disciples of Jesus." The second time, Peter said, "You are wrong, I don't know Jesus."

Then one of them recognized his accent. Galileans were the rednecks, the hillbillies of the Jews. One man said, "I can tell by the way you talk, you're from Galilee. You are with Jesus."

At that moment Peter lost it. He cursed like the sailor he was. He said, "Blankety-blank! I told you already that I'll be blankety-blank if I even know Jesus, now leave me alone! And at that precise moment, it happened. It was still a long time before dawn, but God reached down and plucked the tail feathers of a nearby rooster and it let out a cock-a-doodle do to end all cock-a-doodle do's! And it's almost like I can still hear the echo of that old rooster!

## **2. THE STEPS TO RESTORATION**

If you are a human creature, you're going to fail and make mistakes. The thing that reveals the strength of your character is what you do AFTER you fall. If you stay down, then you wallow in your failure. But if you get up and keep trying to follow God, He can still use you. We looked at the steps that lead to failure. Now let's consider how to move toward restoration. Simon Peter shows us at least three steps on the pathway to restoration.

### **(1) Admit your failure**

As soon as the rooster crowed, Peter realized he had failed the Lord. Luke adds an important detail that when Peter denied Jesus, Jesus was being led across the courtyard and He locked eyes with Peter.

The Bible says in Luke 22:60 we read: But Peter said, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. Then the Lord turned and looked at Peter. So Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:60-62 CSB)

The Danish artist, Carl Bloch, captured this scene. If you Google image this picture and zoom in, you can see that the face of Jesus was already beaten, his eyes swollen, and blood caked in his beard. That look must have made Peter's blood freeze. But the expression on Jesus' face isn't one of anger or disappointment. I think it was a look of love. It was as if Jesus was saying, "I told you what would happen, now what are you going to do?" In this moment, you see the rooster crowing as Peter turns his head away from the gaze of Jesus.

Someone said, "To err is human; and to cover it up is too." Once we have made a mistake one of the hardest things to do is to come clean and admit it. Is there an area of your life where you have failed the Lord, and you are in denial? When I was a youth pastor I used to tell students to remember these three phrases do deal with sin. Admit it. Quit it, then Forget it. Admit it: confess it to God. Quit it: stop sinning; then forget it: accept God's cleansing. Admit it. Quit it, Forget it—it still works.

## **(2) Repent of your sin**

The Bible says Peter went out and wept bitterly. The word "repent" means to have a change of heart that leads to a change of behavior. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, it is often a painful experience. That's why Peter wept. He was ashamed of his behavior. When was the last time you wept over your sins?

Years ago churches used to have what was called a "mourners bench." It was a single pew down at the front. During the invitation, that's where people would go and kneel and weep over their sinful condition.

Sorrow and repentance often go together. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 7:10, "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly grief produces death."

Leonard Ravenhill once wrote that spiritual awakening will never come to our churches until we have a visit by Mr. Amen and Mr. Wet-eyes. In our culture today, we see people celebrating sin instead of weeping in shame over their sin.

## **(3) Return to serve with God's people**

Do you know the difference between Judas Iscariot and Simon Peter? Judas was sorry for what he did. He had regret, but there was no repentance. He went out and hung himself. After Peter went out and wept, he repented and then he joined the disciples. He was there in the upper room on the first Easter evening when Jesus suddenly appeared in a room where the door was locked. The Bible says all the disciples except Thomas were there.

Jesus not only predicted Peter would deny Him, but He also predicted Peter would get back on track and would be the one to strengthen the other disciples.

In Luke 22:31 Jesus said, "Simon, Simon, look out. Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Peter failed the Lord when he denied Jesus, but his faith didn't fail. Jesus wasn't finished with Peter. It's interesting to read what was said at the empty tomb in Mark 16:7: The angel said, "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they put him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see him there just as he told you.'" I think there's a reason the angel singled out Peter. Jesus wanted Him to know He was restored.

And in John 21 where we'll be teaching, God willing, in November, the Lord fully restored Peter by asking Him three times, "Peter, do you love me?" And each time Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." Jesus had a big job for Peter. Even if you've failed the Lord, you can be restored.

## CONCLUSION

If you're my age or older chances are you grew up singing the old hymn, "Come thou Fount of Every Blessing." There's an interesting story behind the music. The hymn was written in 1757 by a 22-year-old British pastor named Robert Robinson. The lyrics say: "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing; Tune my heart to sing thy grace; Streams of mercy never ceasing; call for songs of loudest praise..." The third verse says, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love." And we do all have a tendency to wander away from the Lord.

But those words became prophetic for Robert Robinson. He was converted under the preaching of George Whitefield and for a few years he pastored Stone Yard Baptist Church in Cambridge. He preached the pure Gospel and the church grew to over 1,000 in attendance.

But after a few years, Robert started drifting from what he had heard. A liberal Unitarian professor challenged his belief in the Bible. Robert literally fulfilled the words of his song, "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love." In letters to friends, he indicated he had embraced Unitarian doctrine and no longer believed Jesus was God. He stopped reading or preaching the Bible, and his church began to decline, and he resigned as he lost the joy of his salvation.

A few years later, Robert was traveling in a stagecoach from Cambridge to London and a young lady was reading through a hymn book. She turned to Robinson and said, "Sir, this is a wonderful hymn, do you know it?" He recognized it as "Come Thou Fount." He broke down and confessed he had written the words of the hymn as a young man, but now he felt he had wandered far from God, and there was no hope for him. The young lady said, "But as you wrote, 'God's streams of mercy are *never* ceasing.'" And through her encouragement Robert was restored to the Lord, and rediscovered the joy of his salvation. He started believing and preaching the Bible again, and he faithfully served the Lord until he died at age 55. You can drift away, but you can also return to the Lord!

So the takeaway from this message is twofold. First, stay faithful to the Lord and His Word so that when someone asks you about your faith, you won't deny Jesus. Our attitude should be the one Paul described in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For it is the power of salvation to everyone who believes."

The second take-away is that if you have drifted away from the Lord and failed Him, there is hope for you. You can be restored to fellowship and service for the Lord.

## OUTLINE

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"From then on Jesus began to point out to his disciples that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, 'Oh no, Lord! This will never happen to you!' Jesus turned and told Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me because you're not thinking about God's concerns but human concerns.'" *Matthew 16:21-23 CSB*

#### (2) Overconfidence

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#### (3) Peer pressure from the wrong crowd

"How happy is the one who does not WALK in the advice of the wicked or STAND in the pathway with sinners or SIT in the company of mockers!" *Psalms 1:1 CSB*

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"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly grief produces death." *2 Corinthians 7:10 CSB*

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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