

HOPE AGAIN: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade

STUDY ONE

Hope Beyond Failure: The Broken Man Behind the Book

Selections from 1 Peter

God chose Peter to write a couple of letters that would later be included in the canon of Scripture. And you know the last person who would have guessed that? Peter. He would have been shocked.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HAVE you ever made a *big* mistake? The kind that creates the feeling of instant regret that remains for years. Even the slightest thought of your mistake tightens your chest and upsets your stomach as your conscience says, *You are a failure*.

How can we find hope again after we've failed, after we've hurt those we hold dearest, after we feel like God will forever be ashamed of us, or after we've caused what seems like irreparable damage in our life or in another's?

These are the kinds of questions that followed the apostle Peter throughout his life. Peter is famous for his boldness in proclaiming the gospel. But this strong "Rock" of the faith often proved brittle. He demonstrated a lack of self-control. He was often swayed by public opinion. He occasionally ignored Jesus' words. And he ultimately denied his master and left Jesus to die alone.

Yes, Peter was no stranger to failure, but he also had an intimate understanding of hope. He knew that, in Jesus Christ, he could find hope . . . life-changing, life-giving hope . . . again and again. The letter of 1 Peter, the focus of this *Searching the Scriptures* series, is a testament to the truth that *anyone* can find everlasting hope amid even the worst kinds of failure.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Do the feelings of regret linger in your mind or heart today? The good news of the gospel is that God offers forgiveness for even the worst kinds of mistakes. Like pure water from a fresh spring, His Spirit can cleanse your conscience. Offer this prayer as you prepare your heart to study God's Word today.

Father, I confess that I have failed countless times in my life. Sometimes, intentionally. Other times, unintentionally. Please forgive me of them all. I embrace the grace that is mine in Jesus Christ. Use Your Word to instill an eternal sense of hope in my soul today. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As more and more people converted to Christianity in the decades following Jesus' resurrection, the Roman Empire turned up the heat of persecution on those who considered themselves citizens of a greater kingdom—the kingdom of God. This persecution disrupted the life of many Christians, forcing them to scatter throughout the empire.

Due to these circumstances, Peter wrote his first letter to “God's chosen people . . . living as foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (*1 Peter 1:1*). Read *1 Peter 1:6–7* and summarize the essential message Peter wanted to communicate through this letter.

Peter wrote to his struggling brothers and sisters in Christ to show them how they could discover the joy available in Christ even when experiencing the worst kinds of suffering. He wanted them to find everlasting hope when life hurt the most. The message he shared nearly 2,000 years ago was a beacon of light that still beckons us toward trust and hope in Christ today.



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Observation and Interpretation: Peter's Journey with Jesus

Whenever you receive a letter, you almost automatically ask who wrote it. Then, if you don't know much about the letter's author, it's natural to do some digging to learn about him or her. This section will journey through key moments of the apostle Peter's life, so we might catch a glimpse of the broken man behind the book called 1 Peter. Read each passage slowly, and keep track of key observations as you read.¹



Peter's Call Mark 1:16–17	
Early in His ministry, Jesus appeared to be nothing more than a rabbi—just another teacher of Israel. Most rabbis had a following of handpicked students with great knowledge, wealth, or acclaim. Yet from the very beginning, Jesus proved that He was not a typical rabbi. Mark 1:16–18 records Jesus' calling of the first disciples—not men of great prestige but simple fishermen.	
Observation	Interpretation
What did Jesus say when He saw Simon (Peter) and Andrew fishing in Mark 1:17 ?	What does it mean that Jesus would teach His followers to “catch people” instead of fish?
According to 1:18 , how did Peter and Andrew respond to Jesus' call? What description did Mark include to add color to their response?	In 1:16 , Mark notes that Peter and Andrew “fished for a living.” Why is it significant that they “left their nets” to follow Jesus (1:18)?
Accepting the call to follow Jesus is the most exciting, rewarding, and costly adventure of life.	

When Jesus called Peter, Peter looked into the eyes of the Man who in a few years' time would literally transform Peter's life. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Peter's Confession Matthew 16:13–28	
Peter and the other disciples faced one of their greatest tests in a region called Caesarea Philippi. This region was famous for its massive temples constructed to honor pagan gods. In this setting, Jesus posed an all-important question that each of His followers—then and now—must address: “Who do you say I am?” <i>Matthew 16:13–28</i> records Peter’s response.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
What confession about Jesus’ identity did Peter declare in <i>Matthew 16:16</i> ?	Why is it significant that Jesus chose to discuss His identity in a region known for idolatry?
How did Peter react in <i>16:22</i> when Jesus predicted that He would die? How did Jesus then respond to Peter in <i>16:23</i> ?	Why did Peter push back against Jesus’ prediction? What kind of example did Jesus’ death set for His followers (see <i>16:24–25</i>)?
Those who confess Jesus as Messiah enter into a life of self-sacrificial service.	

We really get into deep trouble when we start setting our mind on people’s interests, on people’s opinions, on people’s council, on people’s ideas. Jesus said, “You’re not thinking God’s thoughts, Peter. You’re off target.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Peter's Denial Mark 14:27–31, 66–72	
During Jesus' ministry, Peter followed closely in the footsteps of his teacher, and though he often veered from the path, Peter always wanted to get back in step with Jesus. Yet one particularly large obstacle awaited Peter: Jesus' public trial and execution. Would Peter be willing to follow Jesus all the way to the cross? Turn to Mark 14:27–31, 66–72 to find out.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
What prediction did Jesus make in Mark 14:27 ? How did Peter react to Jesus' challenging words in 14:29 ?	Why did all of Jesus' disciples abandon Him? Why did they not want to be associated with Him at His execution?
According to 14:66–70 , at Jesus' trial, how did Peter respond when asked if he knew Jesus?	How is the disciples' negative example instructive for Christians today?
<i>Failure in the past does not nullify purpose in the future.</i>	

There are many ways you can deny our Lord. When that happens, you can pick up the false notion that you can never again have a place with Jesus because of your denial. No way! The gospel is a message of grace. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Peter's Restoration John 21:15–17	
If Peter's denial was the end of his story, it would be tragic. Jesus, however, is a living example of the grace of God, so He decided to give Peter another chance. After His resurrection, Jesus returned to His disciples despite their choice to abandon Him. Then, in John 21:15–17 , Jesus pulled Peter aside to reassure him of his place in God's plan. Hope was not lost! What relief!	
 Observation	 Interpretation
According to John 21:15–17 , how did Peter respond each of the three times Jesus asked, “Do you love me?”	What kind of attitude did Peter maintain in his conversation with Jesus? What does his disposition reveal about genuine repentance?
What three responses did Jesus in turn offer to Peter?	What does Jesus' conversation with Peter teach about forgiveness and grace?
A broken heart is great preparation for healing fractured lives.	

That is an invitation for Peter to move on in his life and to get into shepherding God's flock. It's like a second chance. It's like a reordination. The Lord knew Peter had failed, but He extended grace anyway. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: One Letter of Hope

In his reflections on 1 Peter and the life of its author, Pastor Chuck Swindoll developed this timeless principle:

One letter of hope brings more encouragement than a thousand thoughts never expressed.

Take some time now to read the [full letter of 1 Peter](#). As you read, think about the author's life and how his dark moments of failure ultimately equipped him to write a letter shining with the hope of Christ. Feel free to use Pastor Chuck's chart to guide you as you move through the letter.

FIRST PETER

	Salutation (1:1-2)	Our Living Hope and Holy Life	Our Submission and God's Honor	Our Suffering and Christ's Suffering	Conclusion (5:12-14)
		"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3) ... for the hope we claim (1:3-12) ... by our walk of holiness (1:13-25) ... for our new identity in Christ (2:1-12)	"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake" (2:13) ... to the government (2:13-17) ... at work (2:18-20) ... like Christ (2:21-25) ... in the home (3:1-7)	"Since Christ has suffered" (4:1) Keep a good conscience (3:16) Share the sufferings and rejoice (4:13) Commit yourselves to God (4:19) Be humble (5:6) Cast your anxiety on God (5:7)	
		CHAPTERS 1:3-2:12	CHAPTERS 2:13-3:7	CHAPTERS 3:8-5:11	
Emphasis		Informing	Exhorting	Encouraging	
Grace		... to go on	... to live faithfully	... to stand firm	
Hope		A <i>living</i> hope through Christ's resurrection (1:3)	A <i>righteous</i> hope through personal submission (2:15)	A <i>trusting</i> hope through faith (4:19)	
Theme		Holy living in a hostile world; hope in the midst of suffering			
Key Verses		1:3-5, 13-16; 2:21; 4:12-13, 19; 5:10-11			
Christ in 1 Peter		Jesus is the living stone rejected by men, who has become the Cornerstone of the church and the Shepherd of our souls (2:4-10, 25).			

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In what ways does this letter of hope encourage you today? Who in your life could benefit from this encouragement as well?

What parallels do you see between your own life and the life of Peter? How do the lessons his life teaches inspire you to follow Jesus more closely?

Let's wrap it up with this encouraging reflection from Pastor Chuck:

The good news is that failure is never final. No failure, no denial, no sin can trump the grace of God that restores the repentant rebel. Peter's life illustrates this beautifully.²



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I confess that I often am like Peter at his worse moments, demonstrating a lack of faith in You. Thank You for using Peter's example to show me that I can find eternal hope in you even despite my nastiest failures. Transform me and use me like Peter—as a bold witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. It's in His hopeful name I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 13 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 143, 145.

