

WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY TWO

Overcoming Failure

Luke 22:31–34, 54–62

What do we need in moments of failure? The grace of God. Grace says, “I’ll reach down and lift you up. I’ll give you a future and a hope.”

—Charles R. Swindoll

FEW troubles are as hard to endure as the heartache that accompanies failure. The failure may have been a mistake in judgment that led to financial ruin, a violation of trust that collapsed a relationship, or a fall into sin that hurt those you love. Maybe it was a promise you broke or a principle you compromised or a tender soul you wounded. Whatever it was, living in self-blame can be unbearable. Regret, like a Sahara wind, can scorch a person’s soul.

You may be trudging through life under guilt’s searing sun, and if so, that’s no way to spend your days! Our Lord desires you overcome your failure. As a God of love, mercy, and grace, He wants you to find victory over the past. He knows you are weak and imperfect, and He is willing to hear your confession and forgive all your transgressions. Then He will enable you to move beyond failure and live a productive life.

The Scriptures are filled with accounts of those who overcame failure, recovered from their shame, and went on to be greatly used by God. There’s no better example than a man named Peter.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Just as battered ships find shelter in safe harbors, we, too, find shelter in the restorative grace of God. As you read the following lines from Psalm 103, enter the haven of grace and receive God’s welcome for sinners seeking restoration and hope.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Overcoming Failure

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*Let all that I am praise the LORD;
may I never forget the good things he does for me.
He forgives all my sins
and heals all my diseases.
He redeems me from death
and crowns me with love and tender mercies.
He fills my life with good things.
My youth is renewed like the eagle's! (Psalm 103:2–5)*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Stamped across Peter's case file in bold, red letters is the word, *hope*. Although he failed by denying Christ, he overcame his failure through the grace of God. Peter's example gives us hope of our own new beginning. "For whatever things were written before," Paul penned, "were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4 NKJV). When we've failed, we desperately need hope!



Observation: Account of Failure

Let's use our *Searching the Scriptures* skills of observation, interpretation, correlation, and application.¹ First, read [Luke 22:14–34](#). Put yourself in the scene alongside Peter and the other disciples. As you read, imagine how the action might have unfolded between Jesus and Peter. Let's look closer at verses 31–34 as we see Peter take his first steps toward failure.

Peter's Failure Examined

Peter's story of failure and restoration begins on the night of the Passover when Jesus was arrested. Jesus warned Peter of a menacing storm on its way: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat" (Luke 22:31). The phrase, "each of you," refers to all the disciples in the room. Satan intended to scatter the weak disciples like chaff in a stiff wind, and he was particularly interested in exposing Peter's paper-thin loyalty.



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Why target Peter? What impact would the failure of Peter have on the rest of the disciples?

Jesus allowed Satan to sift His disciples but shielded Peter with prayer. He assured Peter:

“I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:32 NASB)

Jesus prayed that Peter’s failure would not destroy his faith but strengthen it through repentance so he might strengthen others.

We might think that Peter’s failure would disqualify him. How might Peter be better suited to help others after his failure?

At this time in his life, Peter saw himself as immune to failure and was insulted by Jesus’ insinuation that he was weak. Instead of humbly acknowledging his need for prayer, he proudly puffed up his allegiance for the others to admire: “Lord, I am ready to go to prison with You, and even to die with you” (22:33). Impetuous Peter had yet to learn the lessons that only experience teaches.

Three Public Denials

Jesus deflated Peter’s pride with a sobering prediction: “Peter, let me tell you something. Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me” (Luke 22:34).



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Jesus then led His disciples to the garden of Gethsemane where He was arrested and brought to the high priest’s home for His first trial. The other disciples scattered, but Peter followed at a safe distance and entered the courtyard hoping to watch from the shadows. The stage was set for Peter’s fall.

In the chart below, read parallel accounts of Peter’s denials and write down who speaks, what is said, and Peter’s response.

| | Speaker | Accusation | Response |
|---|---------|------------|----------|
| Denial 1 <i>Matthew 26:69–70;</i> <i>Luke 22:55–57</i> | | | |
| Denial 2 <i>Matthew 26:71–72;</i> <i>Luke 22:58</i> | | | |
| Denial 3 <i>Matthew 26:73–75;</i> <i>Luke 22:59–60</i> | | | |

Matthew cast Peter in the same light as the cursing and swearing soldiers who arrested Jesus. Peter’s raw humanity exposed, he revealed himself to be no better than they were. Luke included a heart-wrenching look from Jesus just as Peter’s third denial crossed his lips and the sound of the fated cock crowed.

At that moment the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Suddenly, the Lord’s words flashed through Peter’s mind: “Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me.” (Luke 22:61)

The look from Jesus exposed Peter’s sin and his real, weak-willed self. His true nature stripped bare, Peter ran . . . not from the soldiers with their swords but from Jesus with His searching eyes. According to Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase, Peter “went out and cried and cried and cried” (22:62 MSG).



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A look can drive a message deep into our soul's inner chambers. What cargo did Jesus' look carry to Peter? Did His look deliver shame—"I knew you'd never amount to much"; guilt—"Look at the mess you've made"; blame—"I warned you but you didn't listen"; or condemnation—"You will suffer for what you've done"?

Knowing our Lord's love for sinners, His look most likely conveyed empathy, not shame; grace, not guilt; compassion, not displeasure. What do you see in Jesus' eyes when you sin? In the space below, reflect on this question. Do you imagine a negative response from Jesus? If so, according to this passage, what would be Christ's actual response to you? A message of displeasure or one of compassion?

Now let's take the next step from observing Scripture to understanding its deeper meaning as we continue Peter's story and see God's grace rescuing and restoring this fallen disciple.



Interpretation: Grace-Filled Glimpses of Hope

The next regret-filled days passed like a living nightmare for Peter. However, when Jesus rose from the grave, so did hope. To the women who found the tomb empty, the angel announced Jesus' resurrection and pointed them back home: "Now go and tell his disciples, *including Peter*" (Mark 16:7, emphasis added). Why single out Peter?



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In another post-resurrection scene, Jesus spoke to Peter face to face. Read the account in [John 21:1–17](#), focusing on the three times Jesus asked Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” in verses 15–17. What do you think is the connection between these three questions and Peter’s three denials?

Who else would be better qualified to tell people about the grace of God than the man who needed it the most? And when the church was founded, who was the one who took the prominent role? Peter. Not Paul, not yet. It was Peter who fed and cared for the sheep. It was as if the Lord was saying, “You still have a future and a hope.” —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Peter’s Growth Over Time

When studying a Bible character, don’t miss the opportunity to look for that person’s personal growth over time. Often, Scripture sketches portraits of individuals throughout their lives, such as in Peter’s case. As a brash, young disciple, Peter trumpeted himself and took no mind of Satan. After the events of Passover night, his tune changed regarding both the value of humility and the seriousness of Satan’s threats.

Read [1 Peter 5:6–9](#). How does his attitude in 1 Peter compare to his attitude in [Luke 22:31–34](#)? The differences in these two passages suggest he learned what lesson?



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In the furnace of failure, the dross of our lives is purged away revealing the precious qualities of humility and dependence on Christ. Can you see growth through failure in your own life? If so, in what ways?

Application: Reassuring Signs Leading to Recovery

John’s account of Peter’s final encounter with Jesus reveals Peter’s response to each of Jesus’ questions: “Yes, Lord . . . you know I love you” (John 21:15–17). With each question Jesus asked, He revealed deeper layers of debilitating shame in Peter’s soul, covered Peter’s shame with grace, and enabled Peter for the task ahead: “Take care of my sheep” (21:16).

Wounded and then healed, Peter became fit for the healing work of ministry. Brought low and raised up, Peter was ready to lift up others. Guilty but forgiven, Peter was qualified to preach the gospel of grace—*with power!* When he preached on the day of Pentecost, three thousand souls were saved in one day (Acts 2:14–41)!

As we close this study, write in a journal about a past failure that may be holding you down. Envision Christ looking with compassion at *you*. Receive His outstretched arms of forgiveness. Hear His call to a hopeful, productive future.



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Reminders of your failure will haunt you. Every dawn, roosters will crow your failure, but do as Peter did: hear the rooster’s crow as a reminder of Christ’s compassion and as a daily calling to share your restoration with others. Let’s face it; we’ve all failed. But by God’s grace, your failure need not define you or linger as a disabling presence in your life. From failure’s bondage, Christ has set you free!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, through your Word, I hear Your voice saying, “Trust Me to take care of your sin.” I do trust You and desire to release my past failures into Your hands of grace. You say, “I offer you a future and a hope.” Thank You for giving me a reason to live and the power to overcome and move on. Guide my steps as I humbly and gratefully depend on You each day. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.”



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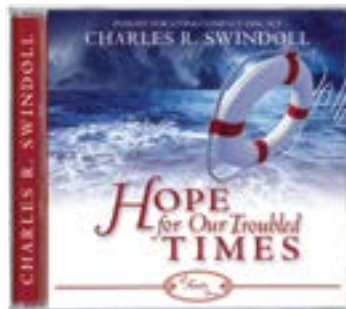
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

