

Do I lose my place when I fail?

Luke 22:55-60

If you and I are going to be used as teammates in the kingdom of our Lord, we must be able to deal with failure.

Peter is the poster boy for opportunities to deal with failure.

He is one of those people who speaks and acts before his mind is engaged.

Sometimes, his mind never engages; he just stumbles ahead!

As we look into his life, sometimes we laugh, and sometimes we just shake our heads in amazement.

In the story from our text this morning, however, we tend to grieve – or maybe we can identify with him.

We have been where Peter is! He is following Jesus, albeit from a distance.

He is struggling to do the right thing, to identify with God. Then – failure strikes!

A servant girl looks closely at him and says, “This man was with him.”

He quickly says, “I don’t know him.”

A few minutes later someone else says, “You are one of them.”

Peter says, “No way, man – not me!”

An hour later another says, “His accent gives him away as a follower of Jesus.

He is a Galilean.”

Peter says, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

So, Jesus’ words are fulfilled, when, just hours earlier Jesus had said to Peter, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.”

Peter had earlier boasted to Jesus,

“Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.” Luke 22:33

Peter’s failure is a moral one.

He lies three times back to back to back and fails to publicly profess his faith in Jesus.

Each of us will face times just like this situation.

Our success in life will be determined by how we handle these times.

First, let’s look at some ways that we can, with God’s help, limit unnecessary failures.

Some failures are avoidable and unnecessary.

Here are some ways we can defeat unnecessary failure on the front end.

The first is to recognize your opponents.

Ways to Limit Unnecessary Failures:

1) Recognize your opponents:

Each of us has three enemies. Ironically, the first one is self.

Someone has said, "We are our own worst enemy." Sometimes that is true!

a) The old nature

We have what we can call the old nature that never completely goes away.

What is interesting in the gospels is that when Peter's old nature has stepped up to take charge, Jesus calls him Simon.

When the new nature is on display, Jesus calls Him Peter, which means "The Rock."

The old nature yields to sin, fear, weariness (that's when I am most dangerous!), and discouragement.

At these points we are most vulnerable to failure.

Which nature is most evident in our lives, the Simon nature or the Rock?

Another opponent is the world system.

b) The world system

Part of this world system includes people. In one way, our enemy is never people.

Yet sometimes people do the work of the devil.

We don't know the motives of the three individuals who try to connect Peter to Jesus.

It's very possible they are trying to do him harm. A third opponent is Satan.

c) Satan

Peter warns us of his work in 1 Peter 5:8-9

1 Peter 5:8-9 King James Version (KJV)

⁸ Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

⁹ Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

Your job is not to defeat Satan. Jesus has already taken care of that for you at the cross.

Your job is to resist him, to stand against him.

Jesus had already told Peter in Luke 22:31a: *“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back strengthen your brothers.”*

2. Another way to limit unnecessary failure is to minimize pride.

***Peter declared, 'Even if all fall away, I will not.'*” Mark 14:29**

What is so amazing about these words is that they are boastfully shared only hours before his denial of knowing Jesus.

Peter does not struggle from a lack of confidence.

That confidence, however, is not a God-centered one; it is self-focused!

Those who lead will constantly do battle with this issue.

Frederick Nietzsche says: **“Whenever I climb, I am followed by a dog called ‘Ego.’”**

Again, we see where Peter has learned from his failures. In 1 Peter 5:5-6 we read,

“In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time.” 1 Peter 5:5-6

Do you want to work with God or against God? That's the bottom line. Do you wish to receive credit and glory due only him, or would you like to funnel that glory toward Jesus? Pride does precede every fall, every failure!

We can also minimize failure by making sure that we use the right weapons.

3) Use the right weapons.

When the soldiers come to arrest Jesus, Peter has a sword with him. He doesn't hesitate to use it, either! Maybe he believes the revolution is about to begin! He wants to be a major part of the action. Jesus rebukes Peter and tells him that he is using the wrong weapon. What weapons should we use to avoid moral failure? I'm warning you – they are unusual weapons for battle!

a) Mercy

Do you think the Holy Spirit led Peter to remember the arrest in the garden when He inspired the following words in 1 Peter 3:9

“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.” 1 Peter 3:9

Mercy is in great supply and is rarely used! Next comes righteous living.

b) Righteous living

When you live this way, you may not get the promotion or the popularity. However, you will be spiritually successful. 1 Peter 3:12a says,

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous.” 1 Peter 3:12a,

He's looking out for those who live righteously! The next weapon is prayer.

c) Prayer

In the garden, Jesus invites his inner core to stay awake with him and to pray.

They keep falling asleep. What a powerful weapon in avoiding failure! 1 Peter 3:12b says,

“...and his ears are attentive to their prayer.” 1 Peter 3:12b

A 4th way to limit unnecessary failure is to stay close to Christ.

4) Stay close

“Peter followed at a distance.” Luke 22:54a

Maybe Peter’s failure can be summed up in this short sentence. Peter followed at a distance.

He basically sat down beside the fire of the enemy.

If your relationship with God could be described by the distance between you and Him, which would be most true?

My relationship with Christ?

- **Out of sight**
- **Barely visible**
- **Pretty close**
- **Side-by-side**

Where would you like for it to be? Again, with God’s help we can minimize unnecessary failure. How?

When failure, moral failure, does strike, we have a choice. We can allow failure to be our worst enemy, or, with God’s help, it can become an opportunity to grow. How can we move from failure to victory? First, be sure to face Jesus...

How to Move From Failure to Victory

1- Face Jesus

“The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.” Luke22:61a

After Peter vehemently denies knowing Jesus for the third time, the rooster crows.

Luke 22:61 says, “The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him.” Don’t you wonder what Jesus’ look would have communicated?

Jesus’ look?

- **Hurt?**
- **Anger?**
- **Surprise?**

A look of total surprise? - I doubt it! I don’t believe it was any of the above.

I believe Jesus looked with compassion at one of his children who was hurting.

When you fail, don’t deny it, rationalize it, or try to explain it away. Face it. Admit it.

It’s the very first step toward healing.

All great leaders acknowledge their failures rather than trying to cover them up.

And then we need to grieve the failure, but we need to make sure that we grieve with hope.

2) Grieve...with hope.

“And he went outside and wept bitterly.” Luke 22:62

Jesus looks at Peter. Then Peter remembers what Jesus had said to him just a few hours earlier. Jesus told him that before the rooster crows that Peter would deny even knowing Him three separate times.

It seems to me as if Peter is finally experiencing spiritual brokenness. This moment is one of the most important times in Peter’s life.

He finally comes to the end of himself. As he does, he finds God. He is now ready to experience an incredible miracle. Listen to this wisdom from the 28th Proverb:

He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” Proverbs 28:13

Another way to move from failure to victory is to hang around the right people.

3) Hang around.

Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.” John 21:2

Peter does not run. It's part of human nature, the old nature, to run and hide when we fail.

Pride is the problem, yet again. We are embarrassed and rather than facing our failures, we split the scene.

Do you know what is exciting about the Biblical texts at this point?

I discover no evidence that the disciples blame each other. They all seem to be working together.

They are enjoying Christian fellowship together. I am glad that you are hanging out with us today, and we want you to know that you are an important part of the team.

The best part is about to happen. Peter's relationship with Jesus is restored.

“The third time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’” John 21:17a4) Be restored.

We discover here one of the most touching stories in the entire Bible.

Jesus goes out of His way to assure Peter that he is important. Peter and his buddies have returned to fishing. They are out on the lake and have had one of those rough nights with no success.

A man (to this point unidentified) calls out to them from the shore, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will catch some fish.”

We know from John 21 that it is Jesus calling. However, the men in the boat do not recognize him at first.

When they follow these instructions, they are unable to pull the net into the boat because there are so many fish in them.

Peter's mind might have returned to a similar experience years earlier when Peter is called to follow Jesus.

Jesus tells the disciples to go out into the deep water to catch fish. They do so and experience amazing results.

The fishing nets are filled to capacity and begin to break. The fishermen fill the boats so full with fish that they began to sink. This is a spiritual awakening or spiritual marker for Peter.

Sometimes, after times of failure, we just need to return mentally and spiritually to those spiritual markers, those special times when God reveals himself to us in powerful ways.

They refresh us, remind us that God is powerful, and that He did begin a new work in our hearts and lives.

We can't stay in the past, however. We must only visit there for some encouragement. Then we must return to the present.

John is the first to recognize this man on the shore as Jesus. We see some of that old impetuous nature of Peter again.

He wraps his outer garment around him and jumps into the water to swim to shore. I believe hope begins to stir in his heart again. What happens next?

Jesus doesn't jump Peter, berate him, criticize him, or avoid him.

He comes up to him and asks him, "Do you love me more than these other disciples who are here?"

He uses the highest form of love here, agape. Peter answers with a lower form of love, phileo.

Yes, Jesus, you know that I do love you with brotherly love." The brash Peter no longer claims that he is superior, that he loves Jesus more than the rest of the disciples.

Jesus asks Simon if he loves (agape) him. Peter answers again with phileo.

The third time Jesus asks him if he loves (phileo) him, and Peter answers, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love (phileo) you. He admits that Jesus knows what is going on.

Peter has been broken and Jesus is now remolding him for a powerful future.

Much can be said about this dialogue, but here are a couple of truths that are important for Peter and for us.

One is that Peter denies Christ three times, and Jesus asks Peter three times about whether he loves him.

Jesus is showing Peter forgiveness and restoration.

Second, Jesus takes Peter exactly where he is and tells him that there is a job for him.

He needs to feed the sheep. And that leads to the next step for moving from failure to victory. We need to get moving again.

5 Get moving.

“Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You follow me.’” John 21:22

Go and feed my sheep, Jesus tells Peter. Peter gladly obeys. It’s such a great story, a powerful comeback.

A few weeks earlier Peter denies even knowing Christ. Throughout the book of Acts, he faces constant opposition without hesitation. Simon has truly become the Rock.

He is still not perfect and continues to fail on occasions, but God uses him to lead the church at Jerusalem before turning it over to James.

Then he becomes a missionary to the Gentiles before turning it over to Paul.

Tradition tells us that Peter goes to Rome, where he is crucified upside down, fulfilling the prophecy given in John 21:18: “Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”

It’s a new spin on failure. It’s a picture of the power of the gospel. God can redeem any failure you have had. You have not been disqualified from significance in the kingdom of God. You can still have a place on the team, even after you have failed.

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Spiritual strength ≠ Perfection. You will fail. With God, you are not a failure!!