

Please don't take this wrong – but I am standing in a room with a bunch of “failures.” ... [ P A U S E ] ... Every ONE of you! ...And don't worry... I include myself in this characterization. ... We are all failures – who sometimes deny the Lord. ... Every time we sin... we deny Him... and prove what failures we are.

Each of us have failed in ways that it is QUITE a miracle for us to be here studying God's Word! ... You might be so aware of your failures that you sometimes wonder: “*Is there any hope for me?*” ... Or maybe your sense of God's forgiveness is a bit more settled – but doubts and insecurity sometimes will (still) creep in. “*Is it all really true...?*”

Our passage today is just for sinners (like you and me.) ... You see... Peter failed. He failed miserably. ... But in the passage that we are going to study... we are going to find out that there was a new day that dawned for Simon Peter.

(Now) before we turn to our passage... it would be very helpful for us to take-in a truth that Oswald Chambers wrote in his book (*My Utmost for His Highest*.) Please allow this truth to penetrate the very depths of your soul.

“An unguarded strength is a double weakness.” ... [ P A U S E ] ... Wow!!!

Now if you don't get anything else out of this message... please hold onto this gold nugget: “An unguarded strength is a double weakness.”

You see... when people fail... they generally don't fail at their weakest point. ... We would think they would... but most fail at their strongest point. That's the reason they fail. ... They have confidence in their strongest point.

Let me show you that we see this in several places throughout Scripture. It is not just Peter.

Abraham — what would you say that Abraham’s strongest point was? - His faith. ... Abraham was the father of the faithful. ... He was justified by faith. And he is the dean in the school of faith. ... But when Abraham failed... he failed at the point of faith. ... He went down to Egypt rather than staying in Canaan where God had placed him... and he lied about his wife (Sarah)... in order to save his own hide. He could not trust God to get him through that situation. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

What do say Moses’ greatest strength was? Well... we don’t even have to guess about that. The Bible (itself) tells us what it was.

**Numbers 12:3 (ESV)**

*<sup>3</sup> Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.*

We know his great strength was his meekness. Meekness means “the ability to comply, to be taught, to be led.” ... But the meekest man (Moses) failed at his point of strength. Moses became a murderer and killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand. And Moses spends forty years on the backside of the desert because he failed. He failed not at his weakest point. He failed at his strongest point. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

David — what would you say David’s strongest point was? David’s strongest point was his integrity. He was a man after God’s own heart... a man of integrity. ... And yet... where did he fail? ... He discarded his integrity and sacrificed his integrity on the altar of his lust.

If you were to look at the life of Simon Peter... what would you say that his strongest point was? ... It would have to be courage. ... Peter was the one who drew out the sword... and went after the servant of the high priest. That took a lot of courage. ... Peter was the one who got out of the boat to walk on water. ... Peter was a man overloaded with courage. ... And where did he fail? ... He failed at the point of his courage. ... He was the one (who our passage will show) - trembled before a little teenage girl. That's an amazing thing. He didn't fail at his weak point. He failed at his strongest point.

“An unguarded strength is a double weakness.”

Here was Peter's strength: Peter said... “*Lord, I will go with you to prison, and to death.*” ... And yet he failed at that very point... because his confidence was dedicated to himself. ... Whenever we have a confidence that is based on self... we are going to deny Jesus. ... Only when we deny self... will we enthrone Jesus.

When self is on the throne... Christ is on the cross. ... When Christ is on the throne... self is on the cross. ... [ P A U S E ] ... (LISTEN!) **both** cannot be upon the same throne. Guard your strength by making sure your confidence is on Christ – and not yourself (the possessor of a strength.)

“An unguarded strength is a double weakness.”

Peter's sheer humanity makes him everyone's teacher. His impulsive behavior... his eager exclamations and confessions... the praise (one minute) and the rebukes (the next minute) that were bestowed upon him by Jesus... his sometimes BOLD and other times cowardly acts... his

pledges... his bitter tears — all this makes Peter the great example and instructor for all of us - his fellow followers of Christ.

I am sure that this is why the Gospels are so full of Peter! No disciple spoke as often as Peter. ... And (out of necessity) our Lord addressed him more than any other of His followers. No disciple was reproved by Jesus as much or as strongly as Peter was... and he was the only disciple who thought it his duty to reprove Jesus! ... It would seem that no disciple ever so boldly confessed and encouraged Christ — and none ever bothered our Lord more than Peter. ... Peter was always talking—and his verbiage ranged from the ridiculous to the profoundly inspiring.

Shortly after Peter's calling... when he observed the miracle of the great catch of fish... he cried, "*Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!*" (Luke 5:8). On that stormy night out in the boat... it was Peter who bravely called, "*Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water*" (Matthew 14:28.) ... In answer to Christ's question as to who He was... Peter's firm response was: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16). And yet a few moments later when Christ spoke of the cross... Peter foolishly replied: "*Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!*" (v. 22).

(And) it will always be to Peter's credit that when the others abandoned Jesus... (realizing he was not primarily a Savior of the military/political order... but (instead) a spiritual Savior... and Jesus emotionally asked: "*You do not want to leave too, do you?*" Peter replied: "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*" (John 6:67, 68).

But (then) it was also Peter who (later) on the Mount of Transfiguration... where Jesus was shining like the sun... made the preposterous proposal: *“Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah”* (Matthew 17:4).

Later... in the Upper Room... John’s account records Peter as saying, *“You shall never wash my feet”* (13:8). Then... hearing Jesus’ explanation... he loudly reversed himself... saying... *“Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”*

Peter’s sheer humanity makes him everyone’s teacher. ... But the night of his failure is (perhaps) the most instructive night of his life. ... “An unguarded strength is a double weakness.”

### **Luke 22:54-55**

Having seized Jesus... His captors brought Him to the highpriest’s house or palace. ... Caiaphas’ house was well-known in Jerusalem. His palace had buildings surrounding an open/unroofed courtyard. An arched passage led from the heavy *gate* (which had a posted guard) into this inner court.

So... how did Peter get inside...? John 18:15-16 tell us... As we go there... let me remind you that John always refers to HIMSELF in his Gospel as “another disciple”... “a disciple whom Jesus loved”... and “that disciple.” So John writes (here) about himself and Peter.

### **John 18:15-16 (ESV)**

*<sup>15</sup> Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, <sup>16</sup> but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and*

*spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in.*

John... Andrew... and their father had a nice fishing business. Some scholars speculate that they probably sold fish to the highpriest and that is why John 18:15 said the high priest KNEW John. This makes sense as to why she let John inside and granted John's request to let Peter in as well.

OK... so... Peter... (then)... having been allowed to enter the palace by a girl who was the gatekeeper... came through the outer gate... walked through the archway that led to the unroofed courtyard... sat down with the palace servants and the temple guards (policemen)... and stretched out his hands... warming himself near the fire.

It is at this point... that Luke tells the story of Peter's three denials. These denials (by-the-way) are reported in all four Gospels. So we can have a pretty good composite picture of what happened. ... Luke and the other gospels say that Peter was following at a distance.

It seems to me that their description of "distance" was not only speaking in terms of physical proximity – but also spiritual proximity. He was drifting away from Christ in his devotion... and this would prepare him for the denials.

(Here is a little more about this "drifting.") Peter's failure – just like our own failures – did not happen (suddenly.) No one (really) **FALLS** into sin! "Fall into sin" is such a bad phrase. That never happens! We don't wake up one day and say: "*Hmmm I think I will go out and commit adultery...*" Whenever something like that happens... it is the result of taking multiple steps downhill (gradually... and over time.)

A major compromise in a believer's life starts-off FIRST as a small compromise... and then another... and then one that is seen as a greater sin... and then one that is even greater... and then... and then... and then – BOOM! - the major sin with overwhelming consequences.

Yours and my best hope for **not** falling into a major sin with horrible consequence... is to recognize whenever we are on the slope... (when we recognize that we are taking the smaller steps toward rock bottom.)... Recognize where we are and repent (NOW)! Otherwise we are likely to keep going further and further downward. It is foolish to justify our sin by saying... *“Well at least I didn't go all the way. My sin isn't really out of control yet. I don't need to be concerned...”*

Here is what Peter did. **#1.)** He didn't take the Lord's warnings seriously – but quickly denied that it would even be possible for him to deny Jesus. **#2.)** In the Garden of Gethsemane... Jesus asked him to watch and pray – so that he would not fall into temptation. But Peter could not stay awake. He was totally unprepared for Satan's attack. **#3.)** We see in verse 55 (here) that Peter kept company with the wrong people. He was among those who arrested Christ... joining them around the fire.

**Psalm 1:1 (ESV)**

*<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

Peter did what we very often do. Step... step... step... **BAM!**

**Luke 22:56-57**

The usual chatter doubtless continued as people swapped ideas about the arrest of Jesus. ... They gossiped about Jesus and His disciples... perhaps

about the scared look on their faces as they ran away like “rats on a sinking ship.” ... Peter (I’m sure) sat there tongue-tied. What could he have dared said or done to fit-in... and not give himself away? Oh... maybe he could throw in a few... “yah”s... wow!s... or grunted a few huh!s...

Before long... “a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire... and earnestly looked upon him... and said: ‘*This man was also with him*’.” John 18:17 tells us that this was the same servant girl who guarded the gate... She was the one who John had to convince to let Peter inside.

The fact that she had admitted him at the request of John seemed to indicate that Peter (too) was a disciple of Jesus. The uneasiness that could be read on his face confirmed her suspicions. The light of the fire by which he was warming himself made Peter clearly visible. So... she fixes her eyes on him. Then... stepping even closer... she exclaims: “*This fellow was also with him.*”

Now is your chance - Peter. Tell her about your mother-in-law. Tell her about the little lad’s lunch. Tell her about Malchus... half an hour ago. Go on! Tell her what He’s really like... who He really is. ... .. But instead... “*he denied him, saying, Woman, I do not know him.*”

The suddenness and boldness of the servant girl’s incriminating remark catch him off guard. In spite of all his loud and repeated promises of unswerving loyalty to Jesus (promises made only a few hours earlier)... he is now thoroughly frightened. One might say: he panics.

The second denial follows closely upon the first.

**Luke 22:58**



This answer by Peter is a little more harsh – but not yet as harsh as the third denial will be. ... The more a sinner sins... the harder the heart of the sinner becomes. ... The public pressure is heating up... and Peter is wilting; he is trying to stick close to Jesus while remaining incognito.

### **Luke 22:59-60**

This denial climaxed Peter's spiritual collapse that night. For the third time... Peter is identified as a disciple... but now with additional "circumstantial" evidence. Why else would a Galilean be present at this late evening fire? ... The hour-long break has not changed the audience's suspicions about Peter. He is still in danger of being exposed.

Mark... in his gospel account of this event... describes Peter as using profanity and swearing.. This time he used vile speech to punctuate his denial. ... (You know)... Sin gets increasingly worse - the longer we put-off repentance. (Step... step... step... **BAM!**)

### **Luke 22:61-62**

The Lord was after nothing less than Peter's perfection. And this final terrible encounter with the Master reveals what saved the apostle.

The cosmic pain that jolted Peter when their eyes met began the necessary process of remorse. Again he was "a sinful man"... as he had earlier called himself after the miracle of the great catch of fish (Luke 5:8). ... But the knowledge of what he was in his heart was stripped of any rhetoric. ... Its raw meaning was there to stay... with all its sanctifying potential. But the Master's look did even more — it maintained the link between Peter's soul and Christ. ... It was a knowing look that said: "*Peter, it is happening just as*

*I told you. Now remember it all! Because I prophesied more than your fall as the rooster crowed.”*

Christ’s prophetic word in the Upper Room had foretold that Peter would be sifted by Satan’s temptation (v. 31)... and the sifting process had shown that Peter was “mere chaff in the sieve of discernment.” ... Yet Christ was preserving him... so that only real wheat would remain. ... Peter was being transformed by this hardship... into a man of substance.

But there is more! Christ had said: “when you have turned back” (v. 32) – not “if you turn back.”... Jesus was prophesying Peter’s repentance. The message was clear: though through his denial he was a sinner *par excellence*... Peter would repent. And repent he would.

(Also) Jesus had said that when Peter turned back... he was to “strengthen [his] brothers.” Jesus prophesied that Peter would have a ministry — a strengthening ministry. The “sinful man” would actually become a pillar of the church... which he did.

Of course... the reason Peter had not been sifted into oblivion by Satan... (the reason he repented and was restored)... was Christ’s prayer for him: “*But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail*” (v. 32a).

When Peter was indulging in his post-supper snooze in Gethsemane... Jesus prayed for him. ... In fact... Jesus had been praying for him since the beginning of their relationship. ... We all need the prayers of others — godly parents and siblings and friends. ... But behind all those prayers are the prayers Christ offers for us. (LISTEN!) Even if your most beloved loved one who you know prayed regularly – has gone home to Heaven... Jesus keeps praying for you!

Take a look at the restored Peter. This is Peter after the resurrection of Christ... as he stood before Israel's national leaders. This is the answer to what Jesus prayed for Peter...

**Acts 2:22-24 (ESV)**

*<sup>22</sup> “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—<sup>23</sup> this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. <sup>24</sup> God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.*

FEARLESS POWER !!!

Look again at verse 61...

**Luke 22:61**

There are three things I want you to learn about the crowing of this rooster—three things that I pray God will write upon your heart.

**I. In Times of Failure, We Need to See the Sovereignty of Jesus**

Number one: When you fail... in times of failure... we need to see the sovereignty of Jesus. That means that He is Lord. Now if you fail... get your eyes off your failure... and get your eyes on the sovereign Lord.

The sovereignty of God in this passage is brought out in the most fascinating way. ... That rooster crowed at the exact (precise) time. ... Stop and consider just how miraculous this truly is. ...

Allow me to illustrate it this way (and those of you who have ever owned chickens will know exactly what I mean. ... I have not... so I may need you to verify what I have only read...) Two things you should try — one: I want

you to make a rooster crow. (You see... I've been told that there is nothing you can do to make a rooster crow. It will only do it on its own volition.)

Number two: I want to see if you can keep one from crowing. (Again... isn't it a matter of a rooster's own stubborn will?)

What our sovereign Lord had to do was to keep every rooster in Jerusalem from crowing (at all)... until that exact... precise moment. Precisely... (immediately) after Peter had done what he had done - **then** the rooster crowed.

(Again – from what I am told)... Roosters are funny creatures. They think **because they crow** - the sun comes up. They are really just an alarm clock with feathers. That's all they are. (Well... they also make good rotisserie chicken at Costco.)

But it is so interesting... that THAT rooster crowed... and then the Bible says: *“Peter remembered the word of the Lord.”* And when Peter remembered the word of the Lord... Peter had to remember this - **God is still in control.**

You know what Peter's problem was (why Peter was filled with fear... and why he denied the Lord?) ... Things had gotten out of hand. ... His Lord and Master had been betrayed. ... He had been falsely accused. He had been arrested. He had been carried away. ... He was bound... mocked... and forsaken. EVERYTHING IS COMING APART !!! ... Where is God?

What Peter learns at this moment when that rooster crows is that our Lord is still in complete control - nothing has gotten out of hand.

When everything unraveled... Peter's faith turned to doubt... and doubt turned to fear... and fear turned to denial. ... .. But when that rooster crowed... suddenly Peter was seeing that Jesus Christ is still in absolute... complete control.

May I give you a definition of faith that is not mine? I got it from Adrian Rogers... and I think it is a great one: "**Faith is believing God in spite of appearances and obeying God in spite of consequences.**"

What happened to Simon Peter was appearances said everything is out of control — "and obeying God in spite of consequences" — Peter was afraid of what might happen to him had he followed the Lord closely. And so he failed in the faith factor. ... And maybe that's where you have failed. ... ..So... if that's where you are failing... remember the sovereignty of the Lord.

- I. In Times of Failure, We Need to See the Sovereignty of Jesus**
- II. In Times of Failure, We Need to See the Sympathy of Jesus**

Now in times of failure... we therefore need to see the sovereignty of Jesus. ... When you fail... not only do you need to see the sovereignty of Jesus... but in times of failure... we need to see the sympathy of Jesus. He never stops loving us even though we fail.

What was the look that Jesus gave Peter? Was it a spiteful look... a hateful look... a vindictive look? ... No... it was a look of injured love. He is looking at Peter. ... He is still concerned about Peter. ... In the midst of His Own agony... pain... and humiliation... our Lord set His eyes upon His backslidden disciple.

Let me tell you something. (This also comes from Adrian Rogers.) ***Jesus does not change you so He can love you; He loves you so He can change you.*** ... If you are a failure... He still loves you.

If you are a failure... don't ever let the devil say: "Well... God is finished with you. He doesn't love you anymore. He has written you off." He has not. He loves you. This Christ of sovereignty is the Christ of sympathy. Thank God for that.

- I. In Times of Failure, We Need to See the Sovereignty of Jesus**
- II. In Times of Failure, We Need to See the Sympathy of Jesus**
- III. In Times of Failure, We Need to See Our Security in Jesus**

The Bible says he "*remembered the word of the Lord.*" What was that word of the Lord that Peter remembered? It was this: "Peter, I am praying for you." Go back, if you will, to verses 31 and 32:

**Luke 22:31-32 (ESV)**

*<sup>31</sup> "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."*

There were two who were very interested in Simon Peter that day... and they both were interested in Peter's failure. ... One was Jesus... and the other was Satan. ... Now Satan desired to have Peter... that he might sift him. This is where you put the grain in the sieve and shake it and sift it. ... And as you sift it... the rocks and the trash come to the top.

What does the devil want to do in our lives? He wants to sift us so that all the trash... the rocks... the junk in our life... the flaws in our life become

obvious. He wants to find those flaws. And why does he want to find those flaws in my life and in your life? So he can accuse us; so he can condemn us. He is the accuser of the brethren. (Revelation 12:10)

But Jesus also wants us to be sifted... and He will allow the devil to do it. Now the devil is looking for the flaws - but the Lord is looking for the wheat. (You see)... the devil sifts us to find impurities. Jesus allows us to be sifted to cleanse us - not to condemn us.

(And) notice (again) what Jesus said: "Satan has desired you. But I have prayed." Now, keep those in balance and you will understand the whole thing. Satan may desire you... he may tempt you... but he cannot destroy you and he cannot take you.

Jesus will allow our sifting... so that the impurities might come to the surface. This is because He wants us to see them and understand them... and get rid of them so that we might be pure wheat.

Peter is still secure. Why? Because of his own innate goodness? No. But because of the mighty grace of God. "Peter, Satan has desired you to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not."

Now here is the point I want you to see: The same Jesus who prayed for Peter has prayed for **you**. You say, "*Well, I don't know that He has.*" So let me prove beyond a shadow of any doubt that He has. All right, I want you to take your Bible and turn to John chapter 17, verse 9.

**John 17:9 (ESV)**

*<sup>9</sup> I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.*

“Well,” you say, “yes, those were the disciples who were alive at that time. He was praying for them.” Well, that’s true... but He was praying more than for just them... Fast-forward down to verse 15 and 20:

**John 17:15 (ESV)**

*<sup>15</sup> I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.*

**John 17:20 (ESV)**

*<sup>20</sup> “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,*

**Hebrews 7:25 (ESV)**

*<sup>25</sup> Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*

So I fail. You fail. Simon Peter failed. The best of saints in the Bible failed. But when the rooster crowed... a new day was dawning. God’s mercies are new every morning. (Lamentations 3:22–23) You can wake up tomorrow morning as clean... as pure... as the driven snow. Our God does not hold grudges... and there is no problem too great for Him to solve. He is the Christ of sovereignty. He will never stop loving you. He is the Christ of sympathy. And He will keep you. He is the Christ of security.

**IV. In Times of Failure, We Need to See the Sovereignty of Jesus**

**V. In Times of Failure, We Need to See the Sympathy of Jesus**

**VI. In Times of Failure, We Need to See Our Security in Jesus**

God excels at perfecting His saints. He wants to deliver us from our self-sufficiency.