

629 What Can I Do about my Failure?

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

A lady called and said, "Oh, Phil, I've just made the worst mistake of my life. What am I going to do now? Do you think there's any hope for someone like me?" I told her there always hope. Stay tuned and we'll see why.

Today we're asking the question, "What can I do about my failure?" **Failure is inevitable**, but it isn't the end of the world. Failure often creates serious consequences, dark days, damaged relationships, and sleepless nights—but there is hope. **We all fail.** We say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing, miss an appointment, or make a poor decision. Our kids are hurt, our spouse is angry, our boss is disillusioned. A friend is let down, the future is jeopardized, the car is dented, or the money is gone. The apostle Peter is one of my favorite characters in Scripture. He seems frequently to act before he thinks. He loves the Lord and does his best but sometimes fails miserably. We're going to look at some of the life of Peter and see what we can do to overcome our failures.

Many of us try and fail. The New Testament tells a story of a man whose faith failed for a time. While the circumstances are unusual, the experience of trying and failing is common to all of us. Matthew 14:22-32 says: Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

You have to give Peter here some credit. He did get out of the boat and walk on the water. As long as he kept his eyes on Jesus he did well; but when Peter saw the wind and became frightened, he began to sink in the water. His faith in the Lord was what kept him afloat. How often people take their eyes off of Jesus and put it on their circumstances. They forget who Jesus is and how powerful He is. When Peter sank, he cried out for Jesus to save him. We all need saving from sin. But there are times of crisis in our lives when we especially need the Lord. Peter doubted, but the Lord graciously helped him anyway. He'll also help you even in those times when your faith seems small. Call to Him. He'll reach out his hand and help you back to safety. When you see the power of God, you too will say, "You are certainly God's Son!"

In Matthew 16:15-23, [Jesus] said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid *it*, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

It's funny how someone can at the same time show such great faith in Christ and yet miss the point about his suffering. Jesus is indeed the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the living God. Jesus blessed Peter for saying so; but Peter missed the word "must" in Jesus' prophecy about his upcoming suffering and crucifixion. Peter didn't rebuke Jesus out of spite. He loved the Lord and didn't want to see anything cruel happen to him. But the suffering and crucifixion "must" take place for Jesus to fulfill the will of God. Jesus rebuked Peter for thinking about himself and his own desire to be with Jesus on earth. He didn't realize fully that God's plan for Jesus was to suffer on this earth, to die, to resurrect, and to return to heaven. Peter would eventually witness all of that. When Peter stood in Jesus' way, Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan!" I don't know of any other time Jesus calls anyone "Satan." But Peter had become a stumbling block to the will of God and was acting like Satan. It is always a failure when someone opposes the will of God, but even with such a sin, Jesus did not completely forsake Peter.

In Matthew 17:1-5 the Bible says: Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" This magnificent event likely took place on top of Mount Tabor, from which you can see Nazareth, the plain of Jezreel, and Megiddo. God chose this mountain top to reveal the glory of Jesus, a greater glory than that of Moses or Elijah who are servants of God. Jesus, however, is the Son of God. We are to listen to Jesus, to obey Him always.

Many people make the mistake of listening to the wrong sources. Moses was God's lawgiver, and Elijah was God's prophet. Each of them had a ministry to Israel in their day. God used them to do great things. Up until Peter met Jesus, Peter would have regarded Moses and Elijah as his great heroes. It is easy to see why he wanted to show them respect. But the Bible teaches that God now speaks to us through His Son Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-3). Jesus isn't just another lawgiver or prophet; he is not merely another holy man. Jesus is God's Son, and God wants all men to listen first and foremost to Him, not to any other. If you put your preacher up on a pedestal, you've made the same mistake Peter made. If you put a human denomination before Jesus, you've made a great mistake. Jesus is our authority—our only authority. Now God spoke out from the bright cloud a correction for Peter, expecting Peter to change and to become different. When we find we are mistaken, we too should change and get our thinking straight. Today, a lot of people need get rid of their books and start listening to Jesus. Even people with the best intentions can be greatly wrong; they need to listen to the Lord.

Matthew 26:31-35 says: Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.' But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this *very* night, before a

rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.” All the disciples said the same thing too. You remember what happened that night. Matthew 26:69-75 tells the story: Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, “You too were with Jesus the Galilean.” But he denied *it* before them all, saying, “I do not know what you are talking about.” When he had gone out to the gateway, another *servant-girl* saw him and said to those who were there, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” And again he denied *it* with an oath, “I do not know the man.” A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Surely you too are *one* of them; for even the way you talk gives you away.” Then he began to curse and swear, “I do not know the man!” And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, “Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

Even though Peter boasted of his commitment to Jesus, and even though Jesus forewarned him, Peter still denied being a disciple of the Lord three separate times. Peter allowed his fear to overcome his love. Jesus was not far away from Peter when he denied him the third time, and Luke 22:61 tells us that Jesus turned and looked at Peter. Peter went out and wept bitterly. Have you ever committed such a sin, that you wept bitterly for it. Sin brings such guilt and regret; it makes a man hate what he has done and hate himself. Sin is the single greatest destroyer of self-esteem. Judas, you’ll remember, hated his sin so much he went out and hanged himself. My friend, I believe even Judas could have found forgiveness if he had repented. As for Peter, we need to know that the Lord has a way of seeing beyond the present. He also sees the future. Luke reveals the *heart* of Jesus toward Peter, even though Jesus knew what Peter would do. Jesus said in Luke 22:31-34, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Jesus knows when you and I stumble and fail. Have you ever thought that He might be praying for us? Jesus knew that Peter would come back after his failure. “Once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” God knows better than anyone the weaknesses of humans. Yet he loves them and stays with them and gives them another chance.

We must learn from our failures. The Apostle Peter failed. He denied Christ not once but three times before the cock crowed. His failure was recorded four different times in the world’s all-time, runaway, best-selling book, the Bible. Every preacher has preached sermons on Peter’s failure. Maybe you feel like Peter did on that fateful day. You’ve failed, and you don’t know if God can ever use you again. But don’t lose hope. As Peter discovered, failure does not have to be the end for the believer. Don’t give up. This is what you can do: **Take your failure seriously, but not hopelessly.** God is always ready to forgive the penitent and contrite person. Psalm 34:18 says, “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” God loves people, even when they sin. My friend, there is nothing you can do that will cause God to love you more than He already loves you. At the same time, there is nothing you can do that will cause God to love you less than he already loves you. #B

Confess your failure. Don’t try to blame others or dodge your failure. John said in 1 John 1:8-9, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The blood of Jesus can cleanse us from every sin. Talk to trusted friends to gain their perspective and wisdom. James 5:16 says, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” God can bring the healing in your life you need in answer to confession and prayer. Pray that God will help you to use your failures as a training ground for your spiritual growth.

Ask for help. We all need the strength of God in our lives. Paul gave us a divine promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” We need to believe that God will be with us to help us with the strength we need or to make a way of escape. The one thing we must never forget, even if we have failed in the past, God is still on our side and loves us.

The Lord is always ready to forgive, if He knows that you are truly sorry for your sins and willing to change. If Jesus could forgive Peter for denying him three times, He can forgive you. David said in Psalm 51:17, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” A contrite heart, godly sorrow, will lead a person to repent. One is not fully obedient to the Lord merely by being sorry or even by hating sin. He must also change his ways. Peter turned again, David turned again, and so must we. When Peter preached the first gospel sermon on the day of Pentecost, his words pierced the hearts of those who were listening. They wanted to know what to do. Peter said in Acts 2:38-39, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” That’s the same message we bring to you, my friend, if you are not a Christian. That’s the message for all people in all places for all time. It is a message of hope and deliverance, of joy and salvation. You can go to heaven and live forever with the Lord if you will come to Him. No matter what you’ve said or done. No matter how much pain you’ve brought to yourself or others, there is hope for you when you believe, repent, confess, and are baptized. Your sins will all be washed away, and you’ll become a child of God and be added to the church. Won’t you obey today?

Copyright 2006, Phil Sanders
Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org