

# **A WORD FOR FAILURES**

**By**

**Pastor George McKim**

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Unless otherwise stated, all scripture quotations in this booklet are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible.

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## A WORD FOR FAILURES

**Scripture Readings:** Luke 22:31-34 & 47-62

V31] –If you are a Christian, Satan has asked for you that He may sift you as wheat. V47]– Judas didn't only kiss Jesus he actually **smothered** Him in kisses -if you read the Hebrew or the Greek. V54 – “But Peter followed at a distance” – now I have news for you, you cannot follow Jesus at a distance and not get into trouble. If you are going to follow Him, follow in His footsteps. V55] – “Peter sat among them” – the wrong man in the wrong place among the wrong people, warming his hands at the wrong fire – that was Simon Peter. V56] “Seeing him as he sat by the fire” – the fire exposed him in the brightness.

This is a portrayal of a failure. Please listen, because some day the portrait might be you, and you are going to need advice, encouragement, restoration, and you are going to need to be re-instated in God's family. If you have failed, or even if you **haven't** failed, this message is for everyone.

“But He went out and wept bitterly.” that is, with painfully moving grief. This to me is the symbol and betrayal of a failure. Oh the pain when a Christian fails. Oh the grief when a follower of Jesus denies Him and lets the Lord down. Even the best of Christians, the most prominent or outspoken can - if they are not walking close to Christ. They can fall into the devil's trap and let their Lord down terribly.

For Peter it was a case of the wrong man in the wrong place, at the wrong time, warming his hands at the wrong fire - and he ended up saying and doing the wrong things. Simon Peter of **all** people; who would have thought Simon Peter would be the one to deny his Lord repeatedly. Not once or twice, but **three** times - and the third time he cursed and swore with all he had, in order to disassociate himself from the embarrassment of knowing Jesus Christ. But if we trace Simon Peter's steps, we can see where he went wrong. How many have looked back and said, “If I could turn the clock back I would not have done that or said that. I would never have reacted that way!” Hindsight is a brilliant educator, but **after** the damage has been done!

Sadly though, some of us never get over our tragic denial and our feeble, terrible failure. One thing can be said, regarding Simon Peter, in spite of his terrible denial he was fundamentally a devoted follower of Jesus. H.G. Wells said, “A man may be a bad musician and yet be so passionately in love with music.” I remember when I was just saved; and going to Conventions - Maggie Quayle was the organist. She had a Matthew Chapter 6 kind of orientation – her left hand didn't know what her right was doing! But she was passionately in love with playing the organ, although it sounded as if somebody was kicking Bagpipes up and down the street!

Failed Christians need restored, not buried alive! Here was a man who loved the Lord. However terrible Peter's failure he was, none the less, passionately devoted to Jesus - and Jesus never forgot that. There is hope for the man who, even when sinning, is still haunted by goodness. Have you ever sat in a pub, brother? Have you ever sat in a social club, sister - and you are in a backslidden state, because you have denied the Lord and you sit there, knowing you shouldn't be there. You know you have let Him down and you are wallowing in your drink and wallowing in your failure, and you are saying to others, “*I shouldn't be here, you know.*” - You are the Lord's evangelist in a backslidden state. I have met people in pubs and clubs who are backslidden - and they tell you more about Jesus than some confessing Christians because they are living in the guilt of failure.

What Simon Peter did cannot be taken lightly. We need to ask the question, “How did Simon Peter get himself into such a situation?” I believe there are five steps to his downward spiral.

First, Peter didn't take the Lord's warning seriously. - "*Simon, before the night is out you are going to deny me three times*" – "*Never!*" – can you hear him shouting it at the top of his voice? **They** might, but **I** never will. He did not take His Lord's warning seriously. If you play with God's word and refute it, and disobey it, you are going to fall like Nelson! "*It will never happen to me!*" – Never say never in this life – because you do not know what is around the next corner.

Secondly, Peter didn't watch and pray as he was commanded. Jesus came back and found them sleeping. Three times they fell asleep, and Jesus said, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Jesus prayed then got up and went to the cross "Like a lamb to the slaughter." The disciples fell asleep and got up and retaliated by cutting somebody's ear off! If you are not in the right spirit, not in the place of prayer, not in intimacy with your heavenly Father, you will **always** act the wrong way - the way of the flesh. You will react. Peter did not watch and pray as he was commanded – [Mark 14:37-38]

Thirdly, Peter wasn't ready for a satanic attack. "Simon, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you," and, afterwards, "and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." Jesus knew exactly what Peter was going to do and He was trying to forewarn him to cushion the blow. But Peter was pig-headed and stubborn willed; he jumped in with two big army boots on, right into the wrong place! How many people have jumped in where they shouldn't have?

I want to warn young people, young Christians, I want to warn **you** brother, sister, "Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat."

Number four, Peter tried to follow Jesus afar off – now that is a remedy for disaster. You have to have short accounts with God. Short accounts with God keep you in the right spirit, in the right attitude, with the right armour on you, so that when the enemy comes you know how to resist the devil. We are talking about warfare here; we are talking about Jesus being Lord of your life. If He is **not** Lord of your life then Satan will find the chink in your armour and he will pierce where it hurts. "He tried to follow Jesus at a safe distance". There is no safe distance to try and follow Jesus.

Notice, Jesus is only a few metres away. He was there, Jesus could see Peter, and Peter could see Jesus. They could see each other and, as Jesus was being stripped, as He was being punched, as He was being slapped, as He was being humiliated, as He was being physically abused, as He was being mentally tormented; Simon Peter saw this and he couldn't handle it and he couldn't stick it any longer and so he hid himself and he tried to make himself oblivious; he tried to make himself invisible and then, when the young servant girl saw Peter because of the fire lighting up his face, and as the other man saw him as well and as they questioned where he belonged; they questioned, "That he was a Galilean," – 'What was he doing here?' – He was a follower of Jesus. How he spoke, what he said, it was giving him away.

If you are a genuine Christian, your talk will give you away. If you talk as a Christian, you are going to talk the words that Jesus speaks; you are going to walk the way Jesus walks; you are going to act the way Jesus acts and you are going to love the way Jesus loved. When you are in a compromising position it is amazing how you hide. If you don't take your stand in work tomorrow, you will hide for the rest of the week.

I remember working in Shorts Aircraft factory as an apprentice and a Derek MacIlvean was there. Derek was saved in my church in Belfast and he must have been one of the early young converts. Derek walked from East Belfast to North Belfast to the meetings four times

a week – 8 miles he walked! When Derek was saved, he went to his work with leaflets and tracts and started to give them out. A fellow who had worked with him for 12 years was given a leaflet and said, *'I am a Christian too,'* and Derek said, *'You mean to tell me that I have worked beside you in the centre for 12 years and you have never confessed you are a follower of Jesus! I would never have known it because of the way you live!'* The man put his head down in shame and walked away - but he came back to the Lord on the Sunday. If you are a Christian, you have to stand up and be counted.

He tried to follow Jesus at a safe distance and he fell into the trap.

Number 5 – Peter warmed his hands at the wrong fire. In John 18:18 – He was standing. In Luke Ch 22 – He is sitting and now he is speaking negatively. He is in the wrong place at the wrong time and he begins to deny his Lord. In fact, at the last denial, to try and convince the people in his company, that he was **not** a follower of Jesus, he begins to curse and to swear. The old fisherman in him started to rise up again! Have you ever heard fishermen cursing and swearing? They could give you a lecture on swearing! Peter was a rough and ready fisherman when Jesus called him and that life had died. He was living a new life, he was following Jesus - but when he was in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong attitude and the wrong spirit, the old Simon started to rise in him and he began to talk the way he used to talk.

When I played football every word was an 'f' word! I tell you it was dirty, it was filthy and half the time you didn't even know you were saying it. I remember a week after getting saved - on the Saturday I played in a match and the manager made me Captain. I said, *'God help me.'* So I changed quickly and had a 'rub down' from the physio, went into the cubicle and said *'Lord, don't let me curse today.'* It was real to me and I remember the first few seconds into the match a guy up-ended me and I got up and I said, *'No Lord don't let me say anything'* and I tell you - from that day on I have tried to speak clean, and I have tried to live clean – why? – because I respect Him and I love Him.

Peter began to warm his hands at the wrong fire – watch your company! He had been well warned – there are people sitting here and if the truth were told, we have warned you and warned you and you still walked into it – why? – Because you wanted to do it! When somebody has something in their heart to do, whether it is sinful or righteous, they will do it and wild horses will not stop them. I know, I have pastured for 20 years and I have seen it happening. I have pleaded with people, *'Don't go down there.'* – I have pleaded with men, *'Don't go near her.'* I have pleaded with women, *'Leave him alone, stay away from him, you will end up going to bed with him.'*

King David should have been out at the front of the battle but he was lazy - and when you are lazy you are caught. He lay on when he should have been at the front of the battle and then he got up for a stroll on his veranda and he saw a woman bathing herself, naked. One look was an accident; the second look was a choice! The second look created adultery because, when he found out she was another man's wife, in fact the wife of one of his greatest soldiers - Uriah the Hittite, he still lusted after another man's wife and he fell into adultery. Then he tried to cover it up. He brought Uriah home and got him drunk and said *'Away and lie with your wife,'* but, because of the man's loyalty to his king, he wouldn't lie with his wife because his fellow soldiers were out in the battle and you didn't do that with your wife until the victory was won.

He was warned. He saw the warning lights but like a locomotive train he just ploughed through the lot of them and he did what he wanted to do - and then he tried to cover it up. Have you ever tried to cover up your sins? There are some Christians who should be called 'Houdini!' "Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap." There are people reaping the whirlwind. Why? Because they didn't want to accept the warning lights and they walked

straight into disaster and now they are on the way back to restoration and reinstatement. They are not still out there; at least they are back in God's house. Oh God, help me to always help others and never to cancel anybody out.

Peter had been over confident; he had been torn in two. He should have deserted with the others, that would have been easier for him, but he tried to stay with the Lord Jesus and still be there for Him. I can see Simon Peter didn't want to leave his Master and he didn't want to let his Master down; but he got himself into an uncompromising position and he didn't know how to handle it because his Master was there and he was here and he was too far away to help and to get help so he decided to follow Jesus at a safe distance and he found himself in the wrong company, warming himself at the wrong fire. He did the unthinkable for a Christian – he denied his Lord.

Don't run Simon down. You have to go to your fire; you have to come through your experience of denial, your challenge. This is what I love about Simon Peter, it says, "When the Lord turned and looked at Peter, Peter remembered what the Lord said and he went out and he wept bitterly." All it took was one look from Jesus and the truth cut right through into his heart. Cut through the superficiality of embarrassment; cut through all the nonsense of trying to act the big fellow, trying to hide; it cut through - and he ran out weeping profusely.

All it took was one look. That gaze penetrated Peter's cursing defences, causing such conviction and a guilty conscience that he ran out crying his eyes out. The Lord Jesus didn't need to say one word or even point an accusing finger; just the look was enough to speak into Peter's heart and to shake Peter out of his downward spiral. "He went out and wept bitterly" – folks he couldn't stay there a moment longer; he couldn't remain in that company, in that situation, saying those horrible things any longer; he couldn't look back at the one who just for a split second looked at him with such love and remain calm, composed and unmoved, as the eyes welled up, as the voice began to break and as others gazed as he ran, the tears began to flow down his cheeks and he couldn't wait to get away. He ran out and he wept. That tells me that Peter was a born again believer who made a shameful blunder and couldn't face anyone after letting his Lord down - but those tears were not only tears of remorse and regret, I personally believe they were tears of repentance. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." [1John 1:9] Peter wept bitterly, but Judas didn't. Judas gave the money back and went and hung himself. Peter went out and wept bitterly.

The Lord turned - do you know there are actually four 'looks' in our reading? Peter was certainly the centre of attention and not all for good reasons. The servant girl seeing him as he sat by the fire = the look of suspicion. The man saw him among the crowd =the look of association. Again he was asked, 'Are you one of them, you are a Galilean,' =the look of identification. And then the Lord's look =the look of love and revelation.

The Lord's look was not a look of anger; it was not a look of condemnation or disgust, but one of sadness and disappointment -but also one of love. Not '*I told you so, Peter*' but, "*I tried to warn you but you wouldn't believe me. I heard all you said Peter, I heard you curse me; I heard the denial; I heard, but I still love you.*" Friend, He still loves you. Failed believer, He still loves you. Backslider, He still loves you. Even though you have failed miserably; even though you have let Him down and walked away and reacted and rebelled; He still loves you and He wants to give you a second chance.

Was Peter finished? Well probably in everybody else's eyes, yes! Some of you are finished - in the church's eyes; in Christian eyes; **but not in His eyes**. What about Peter? We have to turn to Mark 16:5 "And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed." But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See

the place where they laid Him.” Now listen to the next verse, “But go, tell His disciples – and...” and who? Peter! Who is Peter? – The failure! Who is Peter? – The one who denied Him; the one who embarrassed himself; the one who let himself down. Jesus is saying, “Go and get the big fellow, because I want him there too!”

God is a God of restoration – But He is not finished with Peter. Why? Because in John 21 Peter decided to go fishing and another six disciples decided to go with him. After a night of fishing they caught nothing. Isn't it amazing, when Jesus is not with you and He is not Lord, you catch nothing but a cold! In the early hours of the morning, Jesus sees them on the shore, and He says, “Have you caught any fish?” No! “Cast the net on the right side.” and they do - and they catch a shoal of fish – 153 to be exact. Somebody on the boat says “It is the Lord!” and as soon as Peter hears it is the Lord, he dives out into the water and swims to the shore - and he runs to the Lord. Here is the amazing thing; the forgiving Lord is making breakfast. Jesus made breakfast for the disciples. Did you hear that leader? **Jesus** made breakfast!

When they have finished eating, He made a bee-line for Peter; “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?” We don't know what He pointed to. Some say He pointed to the fishing nets and said, “Do you love Me more than these?” Some say He pointed to His friends and His family – “Do you love Me more than Andrew and the boys?” Some say He pointed to the nation – “Do you love Me more than your nation?” Whatever it was; Jesus said “Do you love Me more than these?” And Simon, son of Jonah, said, “Yes Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said then, “Feed my lambs.” “Simon, just before you go,” “Do you love me?” - A second time. Simon said, “Yes Lord, you know that I love you.” Then, “Tend My sheep.” And before you go Simon just one more question, “Do you love me?” and Peter said, “You know all things; You know that I love You.” And Jesus said, “Feed My sheep.”

Why did He ask Peter 3 times? Because he denied Him 3 times. What was He doing; He was reinstating Simon Peter and He was restoring him.

It is time for you to be restored. It is time for you to be reinstated. It is time for the prodigal son and daughter to come home. It is time for you to receive forgiveness and restoration and reinstatement. There was no probation! “Do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord.” “Look after my lambs.” No probation. Jesus gave him a chance.

Acts 2] On the day of Pentecost the early church was filled with the Holy Ghost. They began to worship the Lord in foreign languages. A crowd of thousands gathered. We know there were thousands because three thousand were saved that day. They said, “What is going on here! We hear ordinary Galileans telling us the wonderful things of God!” And others said, They are drunk!” V14] “and Peter standing up..., said..”. The man who denied his Lord publicly in front of a crowd now stands up publicly and confesses his loyalty.

Jesus will always give you an opportunity to bring you back to the place where you have failed in order to give you the victory. Publicly Peter denied Him; publicly he confessed Him and we read in the living bible, “Then Peter preached a long sermon!” “Then those who gladly received his Word” Whose word? - Peter the preacher – “Were baptised; and that day about 3000 souls were added to them.” The Lord Jesus didn't only reinstate Peter; He actually used him in His work after a miserable failure.

There is hope for failures in Christ. If you have let Him down; if you have been in the wrong company at the wrong time, warming your hands at the wrong fire; saying the wrong things; then it is time for you to make it right and confess your sins and confess that He is Lord of your life again. There **is** hope for failures.