

Lessons From Peter's Ups and Downs

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[0:00] Matthew 26, I'll begin reading at verse 69. Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him.

! You also were with Jesus of Galilee, she said. But he denied it before them all. I don't know what you're talking about, he said.

Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him, and said to the people there, This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.

He denied it again with an oath. I don't know the man. After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.

Then he began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, I don't know the man. Then, immediately, a rooster crowed.

[1:22] Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken. Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.

Peter went outside and wept bitterly. It is a real joy to worship with you all today.

Thank you, Stan, for leading us. Jody, for helping us to worship with your playing. I've been here when Stan's led worship before, but not when Jody's played the piano.

And it's a joy to see our congregation here growing, and gifts being used for the honor and glory of our Savior Jesus. It does my heart good. So, it's a joy to be back with you, to have an opportunity to open God's word to you this morning.

Tell me, can you relate to this? Or, don't tell me out loud, but think in your mind with me. Can you relate to this? You've been on a spiritual high, but it's followed closely thereafter by stumbling into some besetting sin.

[2:33] Some struggle that you have in particular. You walk away from your morning devotions refreshed, feeling as though that you've drawn near to God. You've prayed for strength, for self-control, something that you struggle with.

Prayed for the help of the Spirit and producing the fruit of the Spirit. And you feel as though you've drawn near to God and He to you. And you walk away from those devotions and your children's selfish argument causes you to blow up at them.

You're up, and then you're down. Or maybe it's into the office after a good morning commute.

You've driven to work. You've been able to go over some Scripture, some memorized Scripture in your mind as you went.

You were able to pray as you drove, with your eyes open of course. You didn't even get angry at the guy that cut you off in traffic. You're having a really good morning so far. You're up.

You're doing well. And then your co-worker's inconsiderateness or incompetence leaves you boiling angry on the inside. It ruins your day.

[3:39] It affects everything that happens the rest of the day. You're up, and then you're down. Maybe you know what it is to come down off this spiritual mountaintop, so to speak. Maybe slower. Bit by bit, you descend into the valley, and a little coldness goes unchecked.

You fail to heed a warning. Your heart grows increasingly dull until you sin in a way that you couldn't have imagined when you were back on that mountaintop.

Perhaps it's gaining the upper hand in an ongoing struggle with that particular besetting sin of yours, whatever it is. You've seen real progress.

You've really controlled your temper with your children. Several months have gone by without a fall.

You haven't clicked over to that website.

And then seemingly out of the blue comes a temptation to that whatever it is particular sin that you struggle with, a temptation so strong that you give in seemingly without any resistance at all.

[4:38] If any of those scenarios that we've painted this morning or something like it or similar to them resonate with you, then I pray that you'll find help this morning from considering the lessons from Peter's ups and downs.

The Apostle Peter was all over the map. Up and down. We're going to consider mostly this morning the very low point of his life. After a three-year journey with Jesus, their time, the disciples' time with Jesus on the earth is drawing to a close.

It's coming to an end. And Matthew, we've been studying Matthew's gospel down in Warsaw. I've been preaching through that really since we began there. We've taken some breaks here and there, but we're coming close to the end now.

And Matthew has had a lot to say about one of the disciples in particular. And that is Peter. Peter. He's had a lot to say about Peter, but what we're going to see today is Matthew's last mention of Peter.

It's the last time you'll find Peter named in Matthew's gospel. Now, when I was here last time, when I last preached here, we considered Peter walking on the water. A real high point for him.

[5:49] Followed by a very literally low point. He begins to sink. He looked around at the waves. And we talked about some of the things that we can learn from that, about fixing our eyes on Jesus and remembering truth about him.

But now we come to another low point. The lowest point of Peter's life. And from these verses that Stan has read for us this morning, I want us to consider the bottom, because that's where we find Peter.

He's at the very bottom. And then secondly, the way up. Peter doesn't stay at the bottom. Praise God. And then more broadly, some lessons to learn from Peter's whole journey of his ups and downs over the course of his life.

So we begin at the bottom with Peter. Now, to his credit, just before he hits rock bottom, Peter has had a brief recovery. Now, this is the night of Jesus' betrayal. He'll be crucified the next day. Jesus has been, he observed the Lord's Supper. He instituted the Lord's Supper with his disciples. They've gone to the Garden of Gethsemane, where the disciples failed to watch and pray. The mob has come.

[6:53] They've arrested Jesus. All the disciples fled. You see that in verse 56. Then all the disciples left him and fled. The end of the verse there. Peter had another brief good moment there.

Sort of. It would take too long to explain it. But he pulled out his sword to defend Jesus. I think there was an indicator that he was ready to die with Jesus at that moment. Twelve disciples and two swords against a mob of people coming to arrest him with clubs and swords would have been a pretty short, ugly fight.

I think Peter was ready to die at that moment. Good moment for him. Foolish moment. Headstrong moment. Acting without thinking moment. Yes, but a good moment. He was willing to die.

And then he flees. When they actually arrest Jesus. Well, now they've come into the courtyard. Of the high priest. Jesus is on trial. Notice verse 58 with me.

And Peter was following him at a distance. As far as the courtyard of the high priest. And going inside, he sat down with the guards to see the end. So just before this rock bottom moment of Peter's life that we've read earlier.

[7:58] There's this moment, I think, of recovery. Peter goes. He ran away, but then he follows at a distance. He comes back.

I think in support of his Savior. He's present there, which is more than the other disciples can say. Except probably for John. John's Gospel tells us one other disciple went with him.

And it was probably John himself. Now, some commentators fault Peter here. They say he shouldn't be hanging out in a place with the wrong crowd where he would be susceptible to temptation.

I think there's something to that. But if he's supporting Jesus, I tend to think there's not really another place that he could be. This is it. If he's going to try to stick with Jesus, he's here. But he is in a dangerous place. He should have remembered that Jesus had warned him. You're going to deny me three times. And this would be an opportune place for that to happen.

[8:52] You're with probably the mob that had gone to arrest Jesus. Those are probably the people that are gathered in the courtyard at this late hour of the night or early hour of the morning.

But he is nobly trying to stick with Jesus. At the same time, foolish to put himself in a place where he'll be tempted to fall. And fall he does. It begins with a female servant.

And if you compare John's gospel, she's likely the one who kept the gateway and had let him in at John's request. She's pretty confident. You also were with Jesus, the Galilean.

Now, why does she identify him as the Galilean, as being from Galilee? Well, it could be, it's possible, it can't be certain, but it could be that the Jews in the south and Judea had a certain disdain for the Jews that lived in the north.

They weren't as Jewish, perhaps, or not as good as us Galileans. We live in Jerusalem. We're from the south. It's the city of God. And you guys are from the north, Galilee.

[9:51] That's awfully close to some pagan people. You Galileans. Jesus is later identified as the Nazarene, Jesus of Nazareth. And Peter is identified by the way he speaks.

And you understand something of how that goes in our country. Here in the Midwest, our accents are fairly nondescript. But I grew up in the south, in South Carolina and Kentucky, and people there have an accent.

They've got a sweet southern drawl. Or if you're from New York, it doesn't sound so sweet. Sounds a little bit fake, a little bit put on. My wife grew up in New York.

And she thought some, not the accent, but some of the sweetness and syrupy love that people from the south, when she would come visit me in the south, was put on. She thought it was fake. It was a turnoff to her.

And people from the south said, those Yankees, just listen to the way they talk. They're rude. They don't have time for you. They walk by with their nose in the air. They always got somewhere to be. And there's certain stereotypes that we have.

[10:52] If you live in the south, you think these things about the north. You live in the north, you think these things about people in the south. I've been to both places. I live in the Midwest now where it's sort of neutral-ish, I guess. There's something to the stereotypes.

But perhaps not as much as we think. Well, apparently they had something like that. Jesus, the Galilean northerner. Jesus from Nazareth. We can tell by the way that you talk, Peter, that you're one of them.

So Peter must be sweating it now. Jesus is on trial with his life at stake. And this servant girl has identified him as someone who is with Jesus. Which means perhaps his life could be at stake.

And now any nobility of Peter being there for a good reason supporting his Savior is undone by his denying the reason that he's there. I don't know what you're talking about. He doesn't yet say, I don't know him.

He doesn't directly deny knowledge of Jesus, but pretty much he does. I don't know what you're talking about, man. And Jesus, I don't know. And he says it in front of the people gathered there in the courtyard around the fire.

[12:01] The denial is plenty strong, but they're going to get even more forceful. Now it seems this encounter was enough to send Peter scooting towards the entrance of the courtyard. Maybe he's thinking he needs to get out of there before he's caught.

But then another female servant comes up. And as you read the different gospel writers, it seems that they're each recording different pieces of the conversation that's going on.

And you can imagine a group of people standing around talking. One of the other gospel writers says it's the same girl that says something to him this time. Matthew says it's a different girl. Not hard to picture two girls talking about it and both of them saying something.

And one records one and one records the other. And so harmonizing the different gospel accounts, I don't think it's a difficult thing or should be problematic for us. But another female servant does have something to say.

And this time it's directed not at Peter, but to the bystanders. Hey, this guy was with Jesus of Nazareth. Get a look at him. He was with him.

[13:00] Jesus is on trial right over there. This guy was with him. More people are finding out there's some suspicion about this Peter.

And this time Peter's denial is stronger. He denies it and he does so with an oath. I do not know the man. Now he's directly denied knowledge of Jesus. Can you imagine that after Jesus has poured his life into Peter for three years?

And he says, I don't know you. Imagine one of your own children not wanting to be associated with you. I don't even know who she is. That do to your heart as a mother.

Father. I don't know the man. He adds an oath to it, which Jesus says you shouldn't do. Let your yes be yes and your no be no.

Peter wanted a really strong no. It showed that he wasn't speaking the truth. I don't know the man.

[13:59] So Peter must be really spooked at this point, but either partly to his credit or his foolishness, he doesn't leave. Some time passes before the third accusation and he's still around. And then comes that last one, the bystanders that the servant spoke to.

Now they have something to say. Maybe they've been discussing among themselves whether they think the girl was right. Hey, was he with Jesus? This one kind of looks like one of the guys that was with him. Is he the one that had the sword?

And we find out that, I think it's John's gospel tells us that one of the relatives of the man whose ear Peter cut off is in this group. He's going, I think, I think he's the guy that cut Malchus' ear off.

He sounds like one of them. Sounds like he's from Galilee. And so they accuse him. And so Peter's third and final denial escalates, as has the pressure on him, and this time with cursing and swearing.

He denies knowing Jesus. Not cursing and swearing, probably like we might think of that phrase.

But as the NIV has at the ESV, it's likely calling a curse down on his own head if what he says is not true.

[15:04] Swearing to the truth of what he's saying. And no sooner are the words out of his mouth than the cock crows. Apparently for the second time, the first time must not have triggered his memory, but this time he remembers what Jesus had said.

And what again, a painful knife in the back of Jesus to be denied by one of his three closest companions. And not only that, but as Stan noted, Luke tells us that Jesus made eye contact with him.

And what a look that must have been. What pain in our Savior to know that he's been denied. And what a sick feeling in the gut of Peter.

Luke 22, 61, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.

We could speculate all day about that look. It's probably a sad look. Look of pain.

[16:09] Perhaps a hint of forgiveness. We don't know, but he looked at him. Peter has now hit the bottom. That cock crow, the cry of the rooster is like our conscience.

The commentator mentioned that and it resonated with me. The thing that all of a sudden calls to mind and you realize what you're doing. Or what you have done that you have sinned.

And that sick feeling in the pit of your stomach. Knowing that you have stumbled or fallen in some way. It's not a good feeling, is it? And I wonder if you have denied Jesus.

Before we move on to think about a few other things, it would be sad to pass over this portion of the story and not learn from it. These things are written down for our instruction. And what a waste it would be for someone here to go out and to do just what Peter did and to fall in the same way without learning from Peter's fall.

Paul says to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 10, 11 and 12, he's talking about Old Testament Israel. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come.

[17:17] Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. And so maybe you're about to tune me out. Deny Jesus. I'm not going to be in a situation like Peter was.

I'm not going to deny that I know Jesus. I don't think I really need the application that you're about to give me. Do you hear how much like Peter you sound?

Lord, even if I have to die with you, I won't deny you. So we all need the warning. And while Jesus is not physically walking on this earth today, we still have opportunity to deny him.

Maybe you felt the heat like Peter did in that courtyard. You've been in a situation where you could either gladly stand with Jesus or by your actions or your words, essentially deny that you know him. You could stand with him and face the consequences, maybe laughter or mocking or disdain. I can't believe anybody still believes in that stuff. Or worse. Or you could deny him and dodge that uncomfortable circumstance and you have denied him perhaps.

[18:27] You didn't speak up when the teacher asked if there were any dissenting views on the validity of homosexuality as a lifestyle. And everybody has said, yes, it's fine, it's okay, you're born that way.

And everybody has chimed in and you're sitting there thinking, I should say something. The teacher even asked if there's another view. And I could gently and sweetly say that the Scriptures, God believes that it's a sin.

It's contrary to His will. But also show the love of Christ. We show love to such people that we want to see them one to Christ. You could do it gently and sweetly, but still you know how hostile people are going to be and you keep your mouth shut.

Or maybe around the break room at work, you fail to speak up with a Christian worldview as people either lauded or lamented the most recent election results. And some people are, the government's going to save us.

And some people are, we're all going to die because of what's happened. And you could have said, very simply, that my Jesus is on the throne.

[19:30] You've spoken of your King. And you kept your mouth shut. Or even more simply, somebody says, how do you get through the day? You've got so much going on, so many trials in your life. How do you do it?

Or somebody compliments you on your well-behaved children. And you fail to mention, you know what? It's not me who lives, but Christ lives in me. In the life that I live, in the flesh, I live by faith. In the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. And instead of saying that, you don't even have to say that. You say, you know what? It's not me. It's by God's grace. Instead of that, you say, oh, I don't know. I just get up in the morning and I've got this many things to do.

I just say, well, let's get it done. Or, oh, well, thanks. Our kids are really pretty easy. They've got a pretty sweet disposition. It's not, it's just, it's no big deal.

And you had an opportunity there to give praise to God and the Christ who dwells in you by His Spirit. And instead of doing that, you've taken the credit for yourself.

[20:29] And more or less said, I don't know the man. Dear people, watch for and take advantage of opportunities to stand with and for Christ.

It may not be as obvious as it was with Peter. A direct accusation, but you will have these opportunities. And the question is, will you have to go out and weep bitterly when you realize your denial?

Or by God's grace, will you stand with Jesus, glad to be known as His follower? Now, in a few minutes, we're going to talk about some of the warning signs, some of the ways you can be ready for those times.

But for now, I want you to now consider the way up. Peter's at the bottom. What about the way up from there? Well, bitter weeping seems to be an indicator of repentance for him.

Peter's response shows us deep sorrow over his deep failure. And when we realize our sin, we too must mourn over it and repent, which is to turn away from it.

[21:29] And we know that Peter repented from the rest of Scripture. Well, this is Matthew's last mention of him. It's not the Bible's last mention of him. I want you to turn with me. Keep your place here in Matthew 26 and turn over with me for a moment to John 21.

John's Gospel, chapter 21. I want you to see here Peter's restoration. We're going to look at verses 15-17.

This is after the resurrection. And Jesus has something to say to Peter. So John 21, 15. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

He said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, Feed my lambs. He said to him a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? He said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

He said to him, Tend my sheep. He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he had said to him the third time, do you love me?

[22:37] And he said to him, Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you. Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep. Now, it's not my point to preach this passage, but notice that Jesus restores Peter after his dismal failure.

How many times did Peter deny Jesus? Three. How many times does Jesus put the question to him? Do you love me?

How many times does he admonish him? Feed my sheep. Three. I think the threefold denial, the threefold exhortation correspond, and so Jesus challenges this disciple who has failed him.

Is he really ready to go out into the world as a representative for Christ? One of his apostles, one of his sent ones, and to proclaim Jesus after he's denied knowing Jesus, is he ready for that?

The answer proves to be yes. Peter affirms it with his voice here, but then his life bears it out. He would have opportunity again to suffer for the name of Christ, and instead of running away, he stands his ground.

[23 : 53] And he's willing to suffer for the name. He speaks boldly to the authorities who arrest him for ministering and proclaiming Christ. How different is the Peter in Acts from the Peter in Matthew 26?

Who doesn't even want to be known that he's a follower of Jesus when he's potentially facing the authorities. It's not even the authorities. It's just some guys around the fire. And then in Acts, he's standing before the rulers, and he's glad to proclaim the name of Christ.

In Acts 5.41, Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. What a remarkable repentance. What a remarkable turnaround in the life of Peter.

What a joyous thing that is. There's a sorrow that leads to repentance and a sorrow that does not. Clearly, Peter's weeping was a sign of his sorrow that did end in true repentance.

And so, let's be warned about being sad about our sin and truly repenting of it. Those are two different things. And we'll know whether we've got the real thing by whether or not we really turn away from our sin.

[25 : 06] So, if you have denied Jesus today, be encouraged that there is forgiveness and that there is restoration to be found for our fear and our weak faith and for failing Jesus.

The way up from the bottom is repentance. It's restoration by the grace of God. God. Now, for the rest of our time this morning, I want to trace out some lessons from the life of Peter.

Not just from his denials, but the whole course of his life. We're coming to the end of Matthew's Gospel. Down in Warsaw, we are anyway. This is the last mention of Peter and we've had a lot to say about him.

So, as I preach this, I just preached this last week, I wanted us to see something of the big picture of Peter's life and what we can learn from it. So, trace out that picture of Peter's life and remember what we said at the beginning about the ups and downs and see if you don't see that in Peter's life. When Jesus first calls Peter, our fisherman friend starts out well. He follows Jesus who shows hospitality to him. He's one of these twelve apostles who are given the power to cast out demons and to heal the sick.

[26 : 17] When Jesus comes to them walking on the water, it's Peter that has enough faith to get out of the boat and to walk on the water. It's remarkable. But then, we saw last time he looks at the waves instead of looking at Jesus and forgetting what he knows to be true about his Savior, he begins to sink.

Peter's up. And then he's down. And later, Jesus puts a question to the disciples regarding his identity. Who do you say that I am? And Peter has a great answer.

He rightly proclaims him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus says to him, Peter, Peter, you are a rock and on this rock I will build my church. He says to Peter, you're going to be part of that apostolic foundation on which I build my church.

A real high moment for Peter. He's confessed Jesus to be the Christ. He's part of the foundation of the church. This is great. And then, Jesus foretells his suffering and his death and his resurrection. And, hear this, Peter rebukes Jesus. Peter rebukes the Son of God.

[27 : 31] He says, never Lord, it shall not happen to you. Probably some good thought there in Peter, but he rebukes Jesus. And Jesus says to him, get behind me, Satan.

You've got your mind set on the things of man and not the things of God. And so, Peter goes from Jesus saying, you're the rock on which I'll build my church to being called Satan. He's up.

He's down. And then, the Mount of Transfiguration, he's one of the three selected to go up with Jesus' great spiritual privilege and blessing. And here, Peter, I believe, with really noble motives, sticks his foot in his mouth and he shows this great fear.

And then come the events surrounding the death of Christ. And when Jesus foretells, this is a really, really remarkable moment. Jesus foretells his betrayal. He's around the table with the twelve and he says, one of you will betray me.

And Peter and the disciples have a great response. Remember what it is? Is it I, Lord? It's sort of a humble disbelief.

[28:36] I don't believe it could be true about any of us twelve sitting around, but is it me? Do I have that in me? Is one of me? Is what? Could I betray you? It's a humble response, I think.

Really good response from Peter. And then they received the Lord's Supper for the first time from the hands of Jesus. Again, great spiritual privilege and blessing, but when Jesus says that they will be scattered and forsake him, that humble disbelief, where did that go?

Where did that, is it I, Lord? Could that be true? Instead, Peter's going, maybe the rest of these guys. Not me. Though all others fall away, I won't.

He goes from humble disbelief to proud, arrogant, self-confidence. And if I didn't know my own heart, I'd say, what is the matter with you, Peter?

You're up. You're down. You're down. And then Jesus tells him, it will actually be worse for you, Peter. You'll deny me three times before the rooster crows, and we've seen the outcome this morning, but do you remember that Peter denied that too?

[29:45] Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you. Hard to tell if that's a high point or a low point. I think both. Arrogance, self-confidence, ignoring the warning of Jesus, but I think also a noble...

I'm ready to die with you. Even if I must die with you, I'll not deny you. Some arrogant, ignoring the warning, and some noble, he wants to stand with Jesus.

And then they go to the garden, and he's privileged to be one of the inner three who goes in further with Jesus. But instead of watching and praying, he sleeps, and so he's unprepared when the temptation comes.

The mob comes. He makes that valiant effort to defend Jesus, perhaps ready to die with Him as he strikes with the sword. But then as Jesus is arrested, he flees with the rest of them.

And then he rallies a bit, and he manages to follow Jesus at a distance to the courtyard of the high priest. He's there more than the others, except for John can say, great! But then comes the tragedy that we've seen this morning, and how great was his fall.

[30:46] But what a joy to see Peter restored. Do you love me, Peter? Feed my sheep. And he goes, and he boldly proclaims Christ, and he gladly suffers for His name, and he's identified as a follower of Jesus, and he doesn't deny it.

He owns it. He proclaims the Gospel boldly even to the house of Cornelius, the Gentile. One of the first ones to take the Gospel to the Gentiles beyond the Jews.

But then, maybe we're done. Peter ends on a high point. There's another stumble. Paul tells us he had to rebuke him.

He slips into sympathy with the circumcision party, and I'm not going to get into that whole discussion, but Galatians 2, 11 and 12. But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles. But when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. Peter's fearing men again just like he did back in the garden when he fled and like he did in the courtyard when he denied Jesus afraid of men but Peter proves to be a faithful servant of the church despite all of his ups and downs we have his example we have his letters that he wrote containing helpful guidance for us but he's up and down so what can we learn from Peter's journey his ups and his downs first a few comforting things one is that servants of God are not perfect far from it failure does not disqualify you from usefulness to God if it did then there would be no useful servants if failures disqualified people from being faithful servants of God there would be none look at all God uses Peter to accomplish after this wicked denial of his savior get back up child of God be restored and move on in service to our king if you have stumbled quit moping around with a false sense of woe is me I'll never be able to do anything good for the king have you repented have you been forgiven then leave it and press on and service to your God don't wallow in it now there may need to be some testing as Peter does or Jesus does with Peter and it may take some time that your repentance proves genuine but sin failure does not end your usefulness there's real comfort here being up and down doesn't mean that you can't be a faithful servant of Jesus having stumbled badly doesn't mean that you can't be a

faithful servant right within whatever sphere of influence God has given you you can serve God for his glory and for the good of the people around you take heart don't wallow in that if you have repented and been forgiven move on by God's grace as he enabled Peter to do there's a reminder for us to be charitable towards our brothers and sisters in Christ who stumble

[34 : 11] J.C. Ryle reminded me of this you remember Peter's struggle and how God showed mercy to him and then go and do likewise it is very easy for us to from our high horse, we're up on the spiritual mountaintop and we're doing very well and we see somebody stumble in a sin.

Can't believe that guy. Can't believe he did that. That's not the heart that we ought to have towards our brothers and sisters that stumble. Show the kind of mercy that Jesus did.

Ryle says it points out to us, this episode with Peter, it points out to us the duty of charity towards erring saints. We must not set down men as graceless reprobates.

Reprobates because they occasionally stumble and err. We must remember Peter and restore them in the spirit of meekness. Galatians 6.1 Remember to show the kind of love and grace that Jesus does.

And then another word of encouragement. Very simply, you're not alone in your ups and your downs. Great man of the faith, one of the twelve apostles struggled.

[35 : 21] He was up and he was down. And so don't lose heart if you look at your life and feel that way. Now, that's not an excuse for complacency.

It's not an excuse to seek to avoid falling at all costs. And so what can we learn from Peter's ups and downs? How can we avoid the pitfalls of that kind of existence?

Number one, cultivate humility. Cultivate humility. Ryle pointed me to this again. He says, It teaches us plainly that the best of saints are only men.

And men encompassed with many infirmities. A man may be converted to God, have faith and hope and love toward Christ, and yet be overtaken in a fault and have awful faults.

It shows us the necessity of humility. So long as we are in the body, we are in danger. The flesh is weak and the devil is active.

[36 : 26] We must never think, I cannot fall. You see where Peter went wrong here? He had a much too high view of himself. Though all others fall away.

Not much humility. I never would. These other guys, but not me. It's pride. It's not humility. He's got an over-inflated view of his ability to withstand temptation.

Even if I have to die with you, Lord, I'll not deny you. I'm strong enough. I'm okay. I'll be alright. Do you see his pride? And do you hear the warning of Scripture?

Proverbs 16.18 Pride goes before destruction. And a haughty spirit before a fall. Peter was full of pride and haughty spirit.

And he fell. And if you would avoid the pits that we see in Peter's life, remember who you are. You are righteous in Christ.

[37 : 30] If you're a follower of His, you're secure in Him. But you are yet one who is doing battle with indwelling sin. It is not an enemy to be taken lightly.

And if you think that you are okay and that you don't need this warning, then you who stand need to take heed lest you fall. You who think you stand.

And so you remember who you are and you pray and you seek to cultivate humility. You remember your sin and you remember God's grace and that any good that you have is because of Him. And so you walk out of your devotions that morning into that argument with your children and you think, I'm good to go.

I did my devotions. I prayed today. And if you're walking out of there feeling good about yourself because you did your devotions, you read the Bible, you prayed, you asked for help, and you think, I should be good to go because I did all of these things.

And you're not thinking, I'm good to go because I have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in me. If you walk out of there confident in yourself, proud, a fall is not far away.

[38 : 28] Walk out of those devotions humble, bowing before God, trusting in Him, saying, Lord, I know that I'm walking into this situation with my children, my co-workers, whoever it may be.

And unless you give me grace and strength, I will sin again. God, guard me and keep me. I am not above a fall. So protect me from it. Cultivate humility. Know those particular areas.

Don't just look at Peter's life. Look at your own. You know where those besetting sins tend to jump out at you and trap you and ensnare you. You know where you tend to be tempted. Pray all the

more walking into those situations.

God, I know that this is a place where I sometimes fall. Give me grace. I need Your strength. I can't do it in my own. Cultivate humility. That's the first thing. Secondly, watch for the warning signs of spiritual decline.

Watch for the warning signs. As is often the case with a very public fall from grace, they usually don't just happen out of the blue. Now we might see a notable name in the evangelical world of someone in our circles fall from grace.

[39 : 34] And that's shocking to us. We weren't close to them. We just had this name. We had this respect for this person and they fall. And that's boom. It's sudden. But it probably wasn't sudden. We're not close enough to see that there was probably some gradual progression that led to that fall.

And Ryle again is helpful in tracing out this pattern in Peter's life even over just the preceding hours. There's the up and down nature of Peter's life as we've noted.

But then on that night, there's that proud self-confidence that he won't abandon or deny Jesus. Red flag, Peter! Red flag! Warning sign.

You're feeling proud today, aren't you? You're feeling overconfident. And so when that red flag pops up, I don't think I'm going to struggle with that. Warning sign.

A fall is just around the corner. Peter had a red flag right there when he was boasting. I'll never fall away. I'll not deny you. I'll deny you. And you grow complacent.

[40 : 36] Fall is right there waiting for you to fall into. And then there was Peter sleeping in the garden. He's not watching and praying. Warning sign, Peter! You're not watching and praying.

You ever feel some coldness developing in your heart? And you're finding that it's hard to pray. Finding that it's easier to sleep than it is to read God's Word and to pray and to seek to draw near Him.

You were up here before and a little bit of coldness and maybe you thought, you know what? I'm doing so well. I can miss today. I don't really have time to read or pray today. So I'm okay to get by without my lifeline.

I don't need it. And one day becomes two and you slip and you become cold and then it does. It gets hard to pray. Warning sign, child of God.

Feel that coldness creeping in? Peter did in the garden. A fall is coming. It's right around the next bend. You're about to stumble badly.

[41 : 43] Warning sign. And then there was Peter actually fleeing and abandoning Jesus and his resolve is weakening and there was his presence and company that could easily get him in trouble.

Wake up, Peter. You were proud. You didn't pray when you should have. And now one of the very things that you bragged about you failed in. You fled.

You said, I'm not going to leave you, Jesus. The others might, but I won't. And you fled. Peter, your resolve is slipping. You're clearly in a weakened state. And then he's with this bad crowd in the courtyard.

And it's a red flag for you too, child of God. In your coldness, your resolve begins to weaken. You've had some maybe smaller stumbles. You've seen it. You've sinned. You know, it's sort of no big deal.

And you just keep going on. You're starting to spend time with the wrong crowd and it's not really bothering you and the influence is starting to flow from them to you instead of the other direction, which was your intent.

[42 : 47] Well, I want to share Jesus with them and you've not even said a word about Jesus to them. Child of God, you're about to fall into sin in a way that you couldn't have imagined back on the mountaintop.

Warning sign. Your descent may be a bit different than Peter's, but it's likely similar. It's not a sudden radical shift. A gradual descent that makes it so deceptive.

If you would avoid Peter's pitfalls, then guard your heart. Watch for those red flags, those warning signs, and when you see them, repent. This is so important. What do you do when you see a red flag?

You're seeing some coldness. You're seeing some pride. You're seeing your resolve weakening. You have stumbled a bit. Repent. Turn away from your sin. You know what repentance is? If you're slipping down and it's a downward decline, repentance is the turn that moves you back up towards

God.

And if you don't repent when you see that warning sign, you keep going down. Repentance is what keeps us from that precipitous drop into a horrible fall like what Peter had.

[43:51] So when you see the warning signs, repent. Turn away from your sin. Seek forgiveness. And that will prevent those stumbles from becoming these awful falls.

See, it went from pride into the garden with Peter and then fleeing and then to this horrible denial. Alright, so cultivate humility.

Watch for the warning signs. And when you see them, repent. Thirdly, heed the warnings of Scripture. Heed the warnings of Scripture. Sometimes we treat warnings as though they don't really apply to us.

Ever notice that? Not just Scriptural warnings, but ones in life. We see a warning, you think, oh, that's for somebody else. That's not for me. Speed limit? That's for people that, one, aren't very good drivers, and I'm an excellent driver.

And two, it's for people that aren't in a hurry, and I'm in a hurry. Therefore, the warning does not apply to me. Alright, you do that in life with warnings sometimes. No diving in the shallow end.

[44:55] It's right. It's every pool. No diving in the shallow end. I am an expert swimmer. I've been swimming my whole life. I've been diving in the pools. The warning does not apply to me. Wear your helmet at all times.

Really? Have you seen what those bike helmets look like? That warning is for people that have no fashion sense. That warning is for people that don't care what they look like when they're riding their bike.

And I care what I look like. It doesn't apply to me. Do you do that with warnings? Right? Maybe not those ones. We say, you know, the warning is for somebody that needs it, but it's not for me.

Don't do that with the warnings of Scripture. I don't need it. We know about pride going before destruction, but I don't struggle with pride, so I don't need to heed that warning.

You see what we did there, right? If you stand, take heed lest you fall. Well, I know I stand.

[46:04] I'm up on the mountaintop. I'm good. I don't need that warning right now. I know some people really need to pray against temptation, but I'm pretty strong in my faith.

I don't have any particular besetting sins that I really struggle with, and so I don't really see a need to pray against temptation, to watch and pray. I know that Brother So-and-so over here, he really needs to watch and pray, but I'm okay.

Warning doesn't apply to me. I know that I'm supposed to cut off right hands and gouge out right eyes, but I think I can manage to keep up this little sin over here, and it's not going to have too much of an effect on me.

I think, I don't, man, doesn't that sound kind of radical? Cut off. Like, that's bloody. It's violent.

Cough right hands got, it hurts, and I kind of like this little-ish.

And so I think I'm okay. I can manage that sin and not really get after it. What? Do you hear how much you sound like Peter?

[47:08] Disregarding the warnings of Jesus. Peter had tailor-made warnings. All of you are going to fall away. Not me. And then one specifically for Peter.

Peter, this is going to happen to you. Before the cock crows, you are going to deny me three times. No, no, no, no, no. I'll die with you first. You see what Peter did with the warnings of Scripture, the warnings of Jesus, and where it landed him.

And so if you would avoid this kind of life like Peter had and the serious faults that he had, don't ignore the warnings of Scripture. Heed them. Don't assume that they don't apply to you.

So cultivate humility. Watch for the warning signs and then heed the warnings of Scripture. Lastly, what about the high points? Peter had some really fine moments like walking on water and cutting off someone's ear.

And his high points were always sort of mixed. Maybe not always, but some bad and some good. So remember, be careful. Look before you leap.

[48:21] Think before you speak. You know those expressions. It seems like Peter sometimes didn't think before he speaks. I have boys. I have four of them. And we have a train table that I built.

And you can climb up on the table. It's meant to be climbed on so you can play on all corners of the train table. And I was walking into the playroom one day and one of my sons, one of them, you can ask them which one after, was standing on the edge of the table with a lightsaber in his hand.

And one of his other brothers was on the floor, right underneath him. And as I walked in, before I could get a word out, I looked at my son who had the lightsaber on the table. And he looked at me and he jumped. He did not look where he was jumping. He was looking at me and going, if I don't jump, my dad's going to say, don't jump. And then I'm not going to be able to. Or if I do, I'll be disobeying and I'm in trouble. So he goes flying, lightsaber in hand, and lands on his brother. That's a fairly ordinary day at our house. [49 : 29] But he didn't look before he leaped. Leaping might have been an okay idea. The train table, whatever, your lightsaber, boys play, that's fun.

But he didn't look. Maybe he had looked before I walked in the room. Knew his brother was there. A lot of times, Peter leapt and it was a good thing. But he didn't always look. He didn't think through what was coming out of his mouth. Or what he was doing with his sword. And so before launching onto something that you see that may be really good. First impression. Good. Go for it. A real opportunity for spiritual growth. Or doing something great for Christ. A service opportunity. Think through it first. Is it really a good opportunity? Will it really serve others and bring praise to Jesus? Or as I look at it more, is it more self-serving? And hoping that people will notice me. And bring praise to my name. [50 : 29] Will the activity or Bible study group or conference or retreat point you to Christ? And I am an advocate of all of those things done well. Conference, retreat, Bible study.

But they aren't always done well. Just be careful. When you see an opportunity for good, just think. Look before you leap. Evaluate it. Is it really good? Is it a good opportunity? Is it well founded on Scripture? Will it help me grow? Ask some questions before you think. And you might avoid some of the foot-and-mouth moments that Peter had. So, learn with me the lessons of Peter's life, dear church family.

There's so much to be encouraged by. There's so much to be warned about. I've said very little about the grace of Jesus this morning. If Peter denied me three times, I might be done with Him. Not Jesus. So be encouraged. But be challenged as well.

[51 : 29] Never accept complacency or coldness in your walk with Christ. But rather, draw near to God. Pray for the flame to burn brightly again lest you stumble badly. And should a stumble come, don't give up.

So wherever you are on the spectrum today, there's something for you to be doing. Right? You're on the mountaintop. Praise God for it. Guard your heart.

Pray that it will continue. Acknowledge your weakness and Christ's strength. Don't be proud. Don't be complacent. Cultivate humility. Remain active in the Word and in prayer. Or maybe you've slipped down the slope a bit.

You're seeing the warning signs. Take heed lest you fall. Repent. Confess. Beg God to warm your heart again. Avoid those influences.

That have been dragging you away. Or maybe you're here this morning and you have stumbled badly. Maybe you're where Peter was. Rock bottom.

[52 : 28] You've denied your Lord or the equivalent of it. Something horrible. Something wretched. Something you don't even want to tell your parents about.

Or your spouse. Or your friend. Or your Savior. If you are there today.

There is grace in Jesus for you. Go out. Go out from here and weep bitterly. Be sorry for your sin.

And pray that God would give you true sorrow and a sorrow that leads to repentance. And repent.

Turn away from that sin. Pray that God would give you grace to never go there again.

Go to the person that you've sinned against. Confess. Confess. And it may be a difficult process of restoration and regaining trust.

[53 : 28] It wasn't easy for Peter. But don't stay there. Don't stay at the bottom. Don't wallow in your guilt. There is yet usefulness for you, child of God.

There is more grace in Jesus than there could ever be sin in you. So come to Him. And if you have never come to this Christ, then come to Him.

You've heard today it will be a challenging walk. There will be ups and downs. There will be warning signs to heed and sin to avoid and things to repent of. But it is far better than the alternative that is instead of going down repentance and your backup, it goes all the way down into eternal destruction.

So if you're apart from Jesus this morning, you come to Him. You confess and repent of your sin and you beg God to save you, and He will. May God give us grace to learn from the ups and the downs of the life of the Apostle Peter.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank You that Your Word speaks to us. We thank You that it is realistic about the sort of world that we live in and the difficulties and challenges that we face.

[54 : 43] We thank You that it doesn't give us a sugar-coated picture of the Christian life, but one that is real and hard and difficult as we have found in our own experience. And as we walk this road, we pray that You would give us grace to walk closely with You, our God.

To not turn aside to the right or to the left. To heed the warnings of Scripture as though they were written with our name on the front of them. Aaron, take heed, you who think you stand, lest you fall. Help us to pay attention to those warnings. To heed them. And when we see that we're slipping, we pray that You would grant us repentance. And for any that have stumbled badly today, Lord, cause them to run to Jesus.

To weep over their sin and to cry out for forgiveness and to find it. Because You are a good and gracious God. So we pray that You would be our help, our strength. Give us grace to bring honor to You by the way that we live.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify You completely. And may Your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[55 : 49] He who calls you as faithful, He will surely do it. Amen.