



+ **YOU**

**Summer 2023**  
**Mentoring: Investing in Others**

**Sermon Title:** Failure Is Never Final

**To be used with Session 3:** Eli And Samuel

**Scripture:** John 18:15-26, 21:15-19

**Connection with the Study:** To complement the Bible study “Eli and Samuel,” this sermon looks at a well-known New Testament failure. Peter’s denials at Jesus’s hour of trial could have been spiritually fatal and prevented his leadership in the early church, but instead he gained insight into the grace of God and, no doubt, shared his story with others so that they could live in forgiveness, too.

**Introduction:** Arguably the two greatest figures in the New Testament other than Jesus are Peter and Paul. Both men seem larger than life, but both men dealt with personal failure. We focus on Peter’s story in this sermon and learn more about how God dealt with his sin and recommissioned him to be the foremost spokesman for the young church. The disciple who fell short at Jesus’s arrest became the preacher of grace after Jesus’s resurrection.

### **1. A Time Of Disappointment (John 15:19-24)**

The disciples saw the tide of popular opinion shift in what we now call Holy Week. On Palm Sunday Jesus came into the city in triumph, greeted with honor and with the shouts of “Hosanna!” The crowds saw Him as the promised Messiah who would deliver them from Roman oppression. But it became obvious as the week progressed that Jesus didn’t intend to draw a sword or raise an army. Indeed, He told Peter to put away his sword (John 18: 11). Gradually the adulation from the people ceased, and shouts of “Crucify him!” were heard on Friday.

Surely Peter and the other disciples were stunned at what they saw. Though they’d walked with Jesus for three years, they seemed still not to understand His mission. The master was arrested, bound, and brought before two ruling priests in Jerusalem where He was subjected to interrogation, barbaric treatment, and ultimately, crucifixion. They must have thought this was not how things were supposed to happen in the city of David.

### **2. A Time Of Denial (John 15:15-18,25-27)**

Most of the disciples hid for safety, but two disciples furtively followed the chain of events as they unfolded. The gospel writer John never referred to himself by name, but he was most likely the second disciple who accompanied Peter that evening and who had some acquaintance with the high priest (vs. 15-16). Inside the courtyard the gatekeeper recognized Peter as a follower of Jesus, but Peter denied this was true. The night was cold and those within the courtyard warmed themselves with a fire. Preachers a generation ago used to say that Peter “warmed himself with

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the devil's fire." Another person asked if he was a follower of Jesus, and again, he denied this was true. A third time another person in the courtyard asked about Peter's knowledge of Jesus. This third person was a relative of Malchus who Peter had wounded in Gethsemane. But again Peter denied he knew Jesus. Luke's account relates the gaze of Jesus beyond the courtyard, and Peter weeping bitterly (Luke 22:61-62).

### 3. A Time Of Repentance (John 21:15-19)

It was at least one week after the resurrection when Jesus appeared to seven of the disciples who were fishing at the Sea of Galilee. John wrote that this was Jesus's third post-resurrection appearance to the group (v. 14). Jesus prepared a fire and directed the men to dine with Him. Following the meal, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Peter responded affirmatively each time and Jesus told him to "shepherd my sheep," and, finally, "Follow me."

It's no accident that Jesus asked Peter three times about his love for Christ, and "the Lord's breakfast" was at a charcoal fire. Charcoal has a distinct odor and this in itself may have brought back memories of his night of betrayal around a charcoal fire in the high priest's courtyard. But Peter found opportunity to recommit his life to Jesus. The one who denied Jesus in the courtyard became the anointed proclaimer on the Day of Pentecost when three thousand people came to faith (Acts 2).

Science fiction and modern film often uses the theme of "time travel" in which a hero goes back to relive something in the past. These scenarios are good for Hollywood, but they're only fiction. No person is strong enough to pull back the hands of a clock.

Omar Khayyam wrote,  
"The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it." <sup>i</sup>

**Conclusion:** Bruce Hamstra in his 1996 book, "Why Good People Do Bad Things: How to Make Moral Choices in an Immoral World," argued for "good guilt." Guilt is good, he said, if it helps us to learn from our past and make better choices in the future.<sup>ii</sup> Peter's guilt helped tender his heart for the things of God and gave him courage to stand firm in the days of Nero's persecution. Many believe Peter lost his life under Nero. Tradition says the emperor gave him an opportunity to recant, but Peter declared he would not again fail his Lord.

We, too, can learn from failure. Failure is never final if we grow in wisdom, determination, humility and compassion. Our God is a God of mercy who offers forgiveness and redirection when we confess and forsake our sin.

*Michael Brooks is pastor of Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster, Alabama. He previously served as professor of communications at Judson College. He earned two degrees at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, and enjoys reading, writing, and collecting political items. He and his wife, Donna, have two children and three grandsons.*

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/14196-the-moving-finger-writes-and-having-writ-moves-on-nor>

<sup>ii</sup> Bruce Hamstra, “Why Good People Do Bad Things: How to Make Moral Choices in an Immoral World” (Secaucus, New Jersey: Carol Publishing, 1996).