

## **Overflow - Part 4**

*Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:54-62*

**Frailty and failure.**

**Remorse and repentance.**

**Forgiveness and freedom.**

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Michael W. O'Neill

## **Overflow: Part 4**

### **Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:39-54-62<sup>1</sup>**

Some of you might remember that I've got several thousand baseball cards from when I collected as a kid. This is one of those cards. Many of you won't know who this guy is, but his name is Sparky Anderson. That's a baseball name if I ever heard one! Sparky is a Hall of Fame baseball coach and was the only manager in history to win the World Series in both the National and American Leagues. He led the Cincinnati Reds to the top in 1975 and '76, (which is when this card is from) and then with the Detroit Tigers in 1984.

But even Sparky can't win 'em all. In 1989, the Tigers finished a miserable 59-103. Sparky wrote a book about his career, and he said this about that terrible season: "I never dreamed I could be part of a team that couldn't at least play .500 ball. I was embarrassed and ashamed." Sparky, in fact, suffered mental and physical exhaustion early in the season and had to leave the team for 17 days.

Looking back on it now, he writes, "If you think you're destined never to fail, you better keep one eye open when you fall asleep at night. For my first 19 years as a manager I was blessed by so much good fortune I thought maybe the devil had forgotten where I lived. In 1989, I found out that Sparky Anderson has to pay his dues, too. I never got over the point of bleeding a little bit after every loss, but I finally learned to let go. I can't say I'm happy with the pain I went through in 1989. But I'm grateful for what it taught me."<sup>2</sup>

I think the Apostle Peter would say the same thing. Peter is known in the Bible and in history for some great things, but probably the biggest thing he's known for is his failure. When Jesus needed him most, he failed Jesus. But then he went on to become one of the most significant Apostles – his faith and his example became the rock on which the church was built.

Today we are going to learn from Peter's journey from failure to freedom. From failure to freedom. *Say that with me: from failure to freedom.* Because I'm guessing that every one of us knows the pain of failure, especially when it comes to our Christian life. But not enough of us know about the freedom that we can have after failure – the freedom to move past failure and do great things in this world for Christ. We're going to learn that from Peter's life today.

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<sup>1</sup> Resources:

David A. Neale, *Luke 9-24: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition (New Beacon Bible Commentary)* (Beacon Hill Press, KC, 2013)

William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study Series: The Gospel of Luke* (St Andrew Press, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1975)

Ken Heer, *Luke: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007)

*My Cup Runneth Over Pastor's Resource*, The Foundry Publishing, 2024

<sup>2</sup> Source: *Sparky Anderson and Dan Ewald, They Call Me Sparky (Sleeping Bear Press, 1998), pp.194-197*

The story that we are looking at coincides with the Scripture passages in the daily readings for today and this week in the book we are all going through together until Easter.

So far, we've explored and learned from the scene in the upper room that Jesus had with his disciples, and then last week we followed Jesus and the disciples from there into the Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus' agonizing prayer as he prepared himself for his arrest, torture, and crucifixion. Today we pick up right after that. In order to get a more full picture of this scene, we're going to read from both Mark's Gospel and Luke's. So would you be willing to help me honor God's Word by standing with me as I read it for us? Thank you. Just before Jesus was arrested, he said to his disciples:

"You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written:

"I will strike the shepherd,  
and the sheep will be scattered.'

But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not."

"Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same. (Mark 14:27-31, niv)

*(Now we jump over to Luke's Gospel and pick it up from there.)*

Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them."

"Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

(Luke 22:54-62, niv)

I pray that the living Word of God will go deep into our lives and change us. Thanks for standing – you can be seated.

So right out of the gate in this passage Peter's...

## Frailty and failure

...is on full display, and he really represents all of us. Frailty is our human condition. Only those with a self-inflated ego would think that they do not have human frailty. According to Google AI, we are considered a fragile species, susceptible to illness, injury, and death, and we have to rely on complex systems for survival and well-being.

We are physically vulnerable: our bodies are easily injured, and we are susceptible to a wide range of illnesses and diseases. A fall from a height can cause broken bones, and exposure to extreme temperatures can be dangerous. Our skin, while providing a barrier, is also delicate and can be easily cut or damaged. We have a relatively long period of dependency on others for survival, especially in infancy and childhood, making us vulnerable during those stages. We are vulnerable to disease: we are susceptible to a wide range of diseases, some of which can be fatal or debilitating. We can pick up diseases from animals, and our mobility allows diseases to spread rapidly across the globe.

We have mental and emotional and social fragility: our minds are complex and susceptible to mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and other disorders.

Traumatic events or changes in brain chemistry can significantly impact mental well-being. We can struggle with physical, mental, and social issues, requiring systems and support networks to help us cope. We are social creatures, and our relationships and social standing can significantly impact our well-being. We can be vulnerable to emotional distress, social isolation, and other forms of harm.

We are dependent on systems and technology: we rely on complex systems for food, shelter, healthcare, and other necessities, making us vulnerable if these systems fail. Our reliance on technology also creates vulnerabilities, as disruptions or failures can have widespread consequences.

We have a long lifespan and complex needs: humans have a relatively long lifespan compared to other animals, which means we have a longer period of vulnerability and require more specialized care. Our survival strategy is brain-centered, and a functional, competent brain requires decades to develop, making our young highly dependent.<sup>3</sup>

Peter's actions on the night Jesus was betrayed are the epitome of human frailty. Remember that Jesus changed Peter's name from Simon to Peter, which means Rock. Jesus did that because Peter's declaration of faith in Jesus as the Christ – God's Messiah and Deliverer – was the rock on which the church would be built. The disciples all thought that meant Peter would be the leader, and all indications are that Peter thought that about himself too. You might say he was overconfident. But when Jesus needed the disciples to stay in prayer with him while he agonized in the garden, Peter led the other disciples...to sleep. Peter the leader fell asleep at the wheel.

Then Jesus declared that he would be betrayed and arrested, and the disciples would all run away. So Peter, who was always so quick to jump in, *swore* he would never fail Jesus ... and then just a few hours later he failed Jesus and denied he *ever even knew him*. Peter did

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<sup>3</sup>[https://www.google.com/search?q=are+humans+frail%3F&dq=are+humans+frail%3F&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQIRIPAJIHCAIQIRIPAJIHCAEQIRIPATIBCDU4NDZqMG00qAIAAsAIA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=are+humans+frail%3F&dq=are+humans+frail%3F&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQIRIPAJIHCAIQIRIPAJIHCAEQIRIPATIBCDU4NDZqMG00qAIAAsAIA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

exactly as Jesus predicted, denying Jesus not one time, not two times, but three times. Three strikes and Peter was out.

Today's passage says that Peter called down curses when one person asked if he knew Jesus. This doesn't mean he was using profanity. He was essentially saying that if he was lying, he should be cursed. That's a pretty serious denial!

It's likely that Peter was overconfident in his faith. When Jesus told his disciples they would fall away, Peter immediately said that wouldn't happen. When

Jesus told them to pray in the garden, Peter fell asleep like the others. He was so confident that he didn't critically consider his own weaknesses and how they might put him in temptation's path.

Peter's story is a reminder that even close followers of Jesus can fail. We're not *supposed* to fail, but we're frail, so we often do.

How do we fight against our own frailty? The only way to do that is to continually seek God's face and live into God's presence. We humbly and honestly recognize our own frailty and proneness to failure, and we seek the strength God has for us.

Isaac of Syria was a bishop of the church in the late 600s, and he said, "Whoever can weep over himself for one hour is greater than the one who is able to teach the whole world; whoever recognizes the depth of his own frailty is greater than the one who sees visions of angels." We must recognize our frailty and turn to God. When we pack our lives full of what God has to offer instead of trying things in our own strength, there's less room for temptation and sin to enter our lives.

So Peter failed Jesus big time. Can you imagine how he felt? Just hours earlier he was claiming he would follow Jesus to the death, and now he had pretended he never even knew the man. Like the last three years never happened – three years of walking daily with Jesus everywhere, giving up his fishing business, laughing, crying, praying, performing miracle after miracle and worshipping together with Jesus. Lying and saying none of that ever happened. Peter must have felt miserable.

So next we see Peter's...

## **Remorse and repentance.**

After Peter denied Jesus for the third time, the scripture tells us, "The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter." Peter immediately remembered what Jesus had predicted.

Jesus was likely bruised and beaten. Peter probably saw him as he was being taken to his trial before the Sanhedrin. Peter didn't only have to face the reality that he'd failed—he also had to look into the eyes of the One he failed.

Peter went out and Scripture says he wept bitterly. There's something to be said about how deeply Peter felt the weight of his own failure. Now, you and I know that Peter would later know Jesus' forgiveness. I'm sure in his mind he knew that would be a possibility. But Peter didn't treat his failure as if it were no big deal. He didn't justify himself or try to blow it off as if it were no big deal.

When you and I fail, we need to feel remorse too. Of course, we know that we only need to ask God to forgive us, and he will; that we can receive forgiveness from him. Of course. But don't think that forgiveness is an easy thing for God to do. Every single time we need God's forgiveness, no matter how big or how small we think it might be, *it's important to know what that forgiveness cost Jesus*. That's one of the big reasons we spend so much time talking about what Jesus endured in his last days. That's why every single Sunday I stand in front you, and I remind us that Jesus suffered and died for us – he didn't deserve it, we did. But he willingly did it for us. Just because he rose from the dead, don't think his suffering and death was nothing. If you can try to picture yourself being tortured and torn to shreds, nailed to a cross and stabbed, then you are only beginning to understand what Jesus went through for us. His was much greater because it carried the failure and sin and suffering for all of humanity. It killed him to forgive you. So you and I should feel remorse and it should lead us to repent. I said this before, but repentance is to turn our back on our failure and sin. It is a willful turning away. But it's not just turning *from* sin, it is turning *to* God. Sin is in one direction and God is in the other. Repentance is turning from sin and turning to God. There are no other directions. Remorse should lead us to repentance – to turning to God. Because it is there that we, like Peter, find...

## **Forgiveness and freedom.**

We know this happened for Peter because, even though it isn't covered in the passage we read, that is *not* where Peter's story ends. We know that Peter went on to become a great apostle. The rest of his life was spent serving Jesus, and he honored Jesus in his death. Although Scripture doesn't record his death, historical records from the time tell us that Peter was martyred for his faith. Peter was murdered for being a Christian by the Emperor Nero, sometime around 64-67 AD. That's around 30 years after the events we read about today. Remember that Nero was a failed emperor, and it was ultimately Nero's fault that so much of Rome was destroyed during the great fire of 64AD. So Nero tried to blame it on the Christians, and he arrested Peter as a scapegoat for it. When he sentenced Peter to be crucified, Peter requested to be crucified upside down, because Peter didn't think he deserved to be killed in the same way that Jesus was killed. Nero was all too happy to comply.

The man who denied Jesus ended up dying for Christ.

Peter shows us that broken things can be repaired. Like a bone becomes stronger when it heals from a break, Peter's commitment to Jesus became stronger. He went from a hothead to a man on fire for Christ. He went from a hardhead to the rock of the church.

Failure does not have to define us. We do not need to stay there. We should not wallow in our self-made wreckage.

We should mourn our failure, but in a way that does not prevent us from going to God's throne for forgiveness.

Think about this: Peter went out and wept bitterly when he failed Jesus. Judas, on the other hand, went out and hanged himself. Judas, too, realized his failure and regretted it. But Judas's reaction to his failure didn't leave space for reconciliation with Jesus. But Peter,

despite his bitter remorse, repented and never let go of the faithfulness of Christ and found his way back to forgiveness and freedom. The greatest known failure became the greatest known follower.

Failure, even a major one, is an opportunity to learn and grow. We can become more devoted followers of Jesus when we continue to seek God's face, even when we've made grave mistakes. That doesn't mean we welcome failure; not any more than we purposefully break a bone. But we must remember Peter and not resemble Judas.

It's easy for us to point to Peter's failure and think, "I wouldn't do that." After all, he failed Jesus in the exact way Jesus said he would, mere hours after Jesus's prediction. It seems pretty stupid to us today. We think it's obvious where he went wrong. The problem is—we're just like Peter. We make big promises to God and fail to fulfill them. You might even be sitting there right now, promising God you won't fail in a certain area of your life anymore. I want that to be true. God wants that to be true. But don't be overconfident. Be humble and honest. The pastoral and leadership teams are going through a book together called "Soul Keeping" by John Ortberg, and in one place he says that if we were to pray in honesty, we'd say "Dear God, I sinned yesterday, I sinned again today, and I'm planning to go out and do the same sin tomorrow. In Jesus' Name, Amen."<sup>4</sup> That's our human frailty, so what do we do? We approach God with remorse and repentance, finding forgiveness. That's where the freedom comes from to not sin! We don't get freedom from going out and selfishly sinning because we know he'll forgive us anyway. With remorse we repent, find forgiveness, and that's when we get freedom in Christ from failure.

But if we're honest, we've made promises before, and we still fail. Maybe we lose our temper or give in to temptation. Maybe we ignore the nudging of God's Spirit when we see someone in need. Jesus sees and knows all of that—but he still looks at us with love and compassion. When we mourn our sin, confess, and repent, life with him is waiting for us. That's the key – don't ignore our sins, don't treat his forgiveness lightly – mourn our sins, confess, repent, and freedom in life with him is waiting for us.

Where will you go from here today? If you've sinned this week, how is that shaping you? Have you repented? Are you turning away from that life to something better? Today, choose to follow Jesus with all you have, leaving behind what's come before.

*Prayer*

*From failure to freedom! (repeat)*

*Benediction:*

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

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<sup>4</sup> John Ortberg, *Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You* (Zondervan Pub., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2014)