

## Failing Forward: Peter

### **Introduction:**

If you could go back to one moment in your life and do it differently, what would that moment be? Think back to that moment. Why would you want to redo it? What mistake did you make? What wrong turn? What did you miss? And how has that moment affected your life? Think about that for a moment. If you could go back to that moment, how would you change it? What would you do differently? And how do you think your life would be different now?

If you were to ask that question of Peter, there is no doubt what moment he would think of. His mind would immediately race back to that fateful night in the high priest's courtyard when he denied his Savior. Three times he rejected Him. Three times he betrayed the solemn vows he'd made, *"I will die for you. Even if all others fall away, I never will."* Three times he lied. Just as real as the Roman nails that would pierce Jesus' hands and feet the next day, so had his denial pierced his Savior's heart. How many nights did Peter fall asleep hearing the crow of the rooster in the back of his mind and seeing once again the soul-searching stare of his teacher as their eyes met in the most awkward of moments?

His world collapsed on that day. His hopes and dreams lied shattered on the floor of his heart. He sunk into despair and depression. His life lost all meaning and purpose. Then came the morning the women reported the empty tomb. He and John ran to the tomb to see with their own eyes. Sure enough it was empty.

Then Jesus appeared to them. He saw his Lord with His own eyes. His despair twisted into confusion. What could this mean? What about the kingdom? Peter had been so sure that he would play a central role. Christ had handpicked him, called him the "Rock," and gave him the leading role amongst the disciples. Peter had tried. He pulled his blade. He fought back.

But Jesus never stood up to the authorities. He never confronted Rome. He never rallied the masses. Instead, Jesus told him to put away his sword. He healed the man's ear, and he surrendered. He let the crowds turn against Him. He performed no miracles to prove Himself. He displayed no power to put Rome in her place. Even in His resurrection, Jesus did not take his rightful place, and even if He did, what Role could Peter ever have? After his denial, after his lies, there could be no place for Peter in Jesus' plans.

So Peter returned to the one thing he knew so well, fishing. Here with the boats and the nets. Here with the smell of the water and the breeze blowing off the lake Peter knew his place. The sound of the water lapping against the bow of the boat brought comfort to his heart. But even here he could not get away from Jesus. He appeared this morning. He helped them bring in a miraculous catch of fish. His mind drifted back to where it all began three years ago. It was another morning much like this one. It was another morning with empty nets. But Jesus had

said, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." That's how it all began. But hadn't it now come to an end?

Now he walked side by side with Jesus, barefoot in the sand, and the waves lapping at his toes. It is his first intimate moment with Jesus since all of this had happened. Their first private moment since his failure. Jesus uses his old name, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" he said pointing back to the boats and the catch of fish.

*"Yes, Lord," he said. "You know that I love you.*

*Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."*

*Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"*

*He answered, "Yes, Lord you know that I love you."*

*Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."*

*The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"*

*Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?"*

*He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."*

*Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."*

Three times Peter denied Jesus. Three times Jesus forgave him. Three times Jesus loved him. Three times Jesus restored him. Three times Jesus reinstated him into his ministry.

Peter failed, but, in the words of John Maxwell, Peter failed forward. Jesus turned his failure into success. Both Peter and Judas denied their Lord, the difference was that Peter was restored from his failure, but Judas was overwhelmed by his it and went and hung himself.

The key to growing in the Christian life is not avoiding failure. We all fail. We all blow it sometimes. We do the wrong thing. We speak without thinking, and we make a royal mess of things. The key is learning to grow from those failures. We all stumble and fall. It is those that can get back up, those that receive the hand of Jesus to lift them back up, those that learn from their mistakes that grow to make a true difference.

John Maxwell writes in his book *Failing Forward*,

I know of only one factor that separates those who consistently shine from those who don't: The difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and response to failure.

### **Body:**

True success often arises out of the ashes of failure. The Home Depot today has more than 2,200 stores and employs 400,000 employees, and does more than \$110 billion in sales every year. The Home Depot began when in 1978 Bernie Marcus, the son of a poor Russian Cabinetmaker, was fired from Handy Dan, a New Jersey hardware store. This prompted Marcus to team up with Arthur Blank to start their own store in Atlanta, Georgia.

Many of the greatest inventions and discoveries came from failures and accidents. Edison's successful light bulb followed hundreds of failures. The phonograph came out of a failure to invent something else. After several thousand attempts at creating a new kind of storage battery, Edison's friend Walter Mallory commented about the lack of results. Edison responded, "Results! Why, man, I have gotten lots of results! I know several thousand things that won't work!"

Many of the products we use every day are the success of failure.

Ivory Soap - batch was left in a mixer too long and had a large volume of air whipped into it.

Scott Towels - toilet paper machine put too many layers of tissue together.

Smokeless Gunpowder- German Swiss chemist was experimenting with sulfuric acid and nitric acid in his kitchen when he spilled some on the table. He wiped it up with a cotton apron and hung the apron by the fire to dry, and it darn near blew up the kitchen. The cellulose in the cotton underwent a process called nitration. Unwittingly, he invented smokeless gunpowder.

### **Salvation**

But the greatest example of turning failure into success is salvation. Without Christ in our lives, we are spiritual failures. That might sound harsh, but it's the truth. We rebelled against our Creator. We thought we could do better for ourselves than God could. So we went our own way. We were failures. In the words of Romans 3:23, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"

Thankfully, that is not the end of the story. Romans 5:8 says, "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" And listen to Romans 3:23 & 24 in The Message,

*Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be And he did it by means of Jesus Christ.*

This is what we as Christians call "redemption." God takes our sinful, undeserving lives, and He redeems them, transforming them into lives with eternal meaning and spiritual purpose.

### **Life's Small Failures**

If God can do that with the whole of your life, what can He do with the little failures along the way? Yet so often, after failures and mistakes in our lives, we run from what God has called us

to. We run to what's comfortable and familiar. For Peter that was fishing. But we all have fishing boats, our security blankets, the things we run to when we fall short.

But there comes a time when you can run no longer. When you have to make a choice. Am I going to be defined by my failure, or am I going to be inspired by it. Am I going to wallow in my mistakes, or am I going to learn from them? Am I going to simply fail, or am I going to fail forward? Am I going to let Jesus take the worst of my life, and make his best out of it?

Do you have a failed marriage? God has handled a ton of those. A failed business? That's nothing for Him. A failed commitment? He specializes in those. Failed as a parent? Well, he loves prodigal parents as well as prodigal sons. A foolish decision you can't undo? He's got that covered. I don't care what your failure is, when it is nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ, God can turn it into a success.

### **Long Before Dwayne Johnson...**

Nobody knows this better than Peter. We are told in 1 Corinthians that the three greatest Christian virtues are faith, hope and love. Paul is known as the apostle of faith. John is known as the apostle of love, and Peter is the apostle of hope. This is only fitting, for if anyone needed hope, it was Peter.

Peter certainly had some leadership potential, but it was so rough and unrefined, that anyone besides Jesus would have passed. Peter was impulsive, outspoken, and he shot from the hip. He could be your boldest supporter one day, and the biggest coward the next. He could be decisive one moment, but in the next would doubt and second guess himself

Peter was an unschooled, illiterate fisherman. He shared a business with his brother Andrew and two other brothers, James and John. He was raised a devout Jew. He'd spent his life on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, which was often a hotbed for revolutionary politics and whackado messianic hopes. Perhaps this is what led him to follow John the Baptist. It must have come as a surprise when Jesus called this young, hot-headed, backwoods northerner with a turbulent disposition. Not only did Jesus call Peter, but gave him a new name. Long before Dwayne Johnson, Peter was the original "Rock."

That's what Peter means – Rock. His real name was Simon. But we know him as Peter. As the rock. Who would imagine, other than Jesus, that this impulsive, brash, unstable fisherman would become part of the solid, stable foundation on which the church would be built?

Failing forward would take time, and it would not be easy. Peter was the only disciple to get out of the boat to go to Jesus when He walked on the water. But he quickly doubted and feared the waves, and began to sink. In Matthew 26, Peter promised that he would never fall, even if everyone else abandoned Jesus, yet Peter couldn't even stay awake to pray with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He promised to die with Jesus, and even drew a small sword to defend

him, only to deny Him three times later that night. Another time Jesus had to tell Peter, "Get behind me Satan," when Peter tried to alter Jesus' plans.

We also discover that Peter had some deeply held racism. In Acts 10, God wanted Peter to go to the home of Cornelius, a Roman Centurion in the Italian regiment. Peter's racism would not even allow him to eat with such a man. God had to give Peter a vision three times before he got the message. Have you noticed a pattern here? Peter is quite thick-headed. It has to happen three times before he gets it. But this was not the end of it.

The Apostle Paul actually had to confront Peter because of his racism. Gal 2:11-14:

*When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"*

Yet, despite all these failures, there was hope for Peter. God turned his failures into success. Peter did become the rock upon which Christ built the early church. Under his leadership, the church grew from its small roots in Jerusalem. God inspired Peter to write two impressive letters in our New Testament that include these words in 2 Peter 1:3-11

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.*

*For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.*

*Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

### **Conclusion:**

Uneducated. Just a hard-working blue collar laborer. Rash and Impulsive. Braggadocios and unreliable. This didn't stop Jesus from using Peter. God specializes in transforming hearts. He

turns selfishness into a love that serves. He finely hones raw talent into Kingdom-serving gifts. He rebuilds sinful character into Christ-likeness. He did it for Peter and he can do it for you. He can turn tragedy into triumph, mistakes into majesty, and failures into successes.

Jesus can do the same for you, regardless of your previous experience. A shipwrecked marriage? A derailed education? A sinful habit that has you in its grasp? That secret sin that nobody, but God knows about? A pointless career? A neglected spiritual life? An opportunity lost? None of these things can stop Jesus from changing your life, if you just give it to Him.

I won't lie to you though. I don't pretend to offer easy answers. Peter's wasn't transformed overnight. Jesus didn't zap him and he was instantly changed. Jesus changed his name to the "Rock," but it took years before Peter became the dependable, stable, bedrock foundation that he became.

Spiritual growth is a process just as is natural growth. Sometimes it comes in spurts, sometimes it is slow over a period of time. If your life hasn't blossomed into the Christian masterpiece that you thought it would, don't be discouraged. It takes time.

It also isn't always a comfortable experience. Peter had to hit bottom before Christ built him back up. Peter had run back to his fishing. I believe he was ready to abandon his hope and his calling.

To become his best, Jesus had to meet Peter at his worst. That's where Jesus often meets us. That is where he needs to meet you- at your worst. Do you want to see the best that Jesus has for you, then you have to let him meet you at your worst. You have to have an intimate, honest encounter with him in that deepest, darkest place in your life. Until you are willing to show him all that you are, you will not be able to know all of him and all that he can do. Are you willing to let Jesus meet you at your worst? Or are you going to keep running.

*(Pass out post-it notes and have people write 'My failures can be God's success.')*