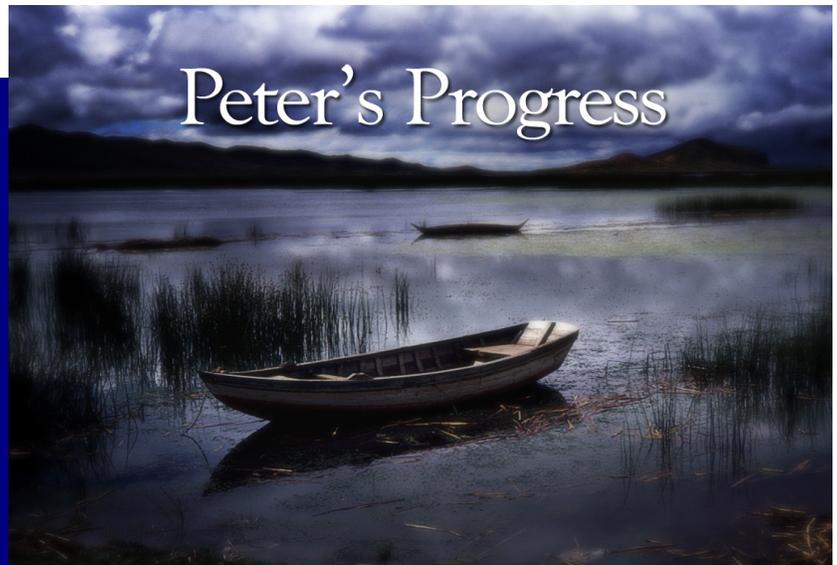


CHRIST AWAKENING

Coming Back



SCRIPTURE STUDY

Mark 14:26, 31, 34, 37, 54, 67-72
John 21: 4, 6, 9, 12

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Jesus,
Jesus, even as we face the challenges and temptations of life, might You fill our hearts “with greater joy than when . . . grain and new wine abound” (Ps. 4:7).
Give us Your peace in our home.
In Jesus’ Name, Amen.
Amen

PROGRESSION OF A SPIRITUAL DECLINE

The day began with intimate fellowship, dinner, prayer, and praise songs. What could be better? What could be more fulfilling? But as the evening progressed, so did the darkness progress in Peter’s heart. These insights from the apostle Peter can enrich any ministry and home, restore joy to the most discouraged, and provide a platform of repentance and authenticity that draws future leaders.

Notice from the life of Peter . . .

1. *He began with deep genuine faith.* Peter, on an emotional and spiritual high, walked in an intimate relationship with Jesus: “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Mark 14:26).
2. *Then Peter’s overconfidence took over.* He relied on his own power and pride instead of following the will of God. “If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” (Mark 14:31). In other words, “It won’t happen to me.” Ever heard or said this before? Each of us has times in our lives when we try to “Fly solo”—that is, we spend less and less time in the Word and rely on our own strength to stay morally pure. Not only does this not work, but we lose joy in our lives as we fight the culture in our own strength.
3. *His overconfidence made him spiritually lazy.* Jesus tried to warn Peter. He said, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch” (Mark 14:34). Peter wouldn’t listen, and he slept while Jesus wept in an intense time of prayer. “Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour?’” (Mark 14:37). When we become spiritually lazy, our guard is down, and we easily fall into sin.
4. *Peter’s intimate relationship with Jesus was replaced. . .*
 - With a distant following.* “But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest” (Mark 14:54).
 - With keeping company with the enemy.* “He [Peter] sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire” (Mark 14:54).
 - With denial of the Savior.* “He [Peter] began to curse and swear ‘I do not know this Man of whom you speak!’” (Mark 14:71).

The denial of Jesus by Peter was a progression of the heart just as any sinful choice is. It is not enough to walk about on a spiritual high, depending on spiritual experiences. We have to remember the warning of Jesus and watch out for the trap Satan has set for us. Peter's adversity followed three choices or traps set before him.

First, it was a small test—just one person. He only needed enough courage to say to one servant girl, “I do know Jesus.” And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, “You also were with Jesus of Nazareth” (Mark 14:67). But he denied it.

Second, he had the chance to tell a few people, “I believe in Jesus,” but he denied it again. “And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, ‘this is one of them’” (Mark 14:69). But Peter denied it again.

Third, he had time to reconsider his choices but failed. “And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, ‘surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean and your speech shows it’” (Mark 14:70).

He had denied Jesus three times, and the third time he did so with anger and cursing: “Then he began to curse and swear, ‘I do not know this Man of whom you speak!’” (Mark 14:71). Notice that Peter no longer called Jesus, “Lord,” but just “this Man” What a sad progression of events. “Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.’ And when he thought about it, he wept” (Mark 14:72).

How can a person go from intimacy with Jesus, a spiritual high, to flat-out denial, and then to depression? The progression leads to spiritual weakness and an adversity of choice, the wrong choice. A spiritually weak Peter ran away rather than face the pain. Anger, shame, guilt, and finally isolation followed as Peter could no longer face those friends who loved him.

RESTORATION IS GOOD NEWS

But there is also good news about this adversity of choice. Not only does Jesus forgive us, but He restores us to intimacy with Him again. Wow! That's kind of different from how we treat betrayers, isn't it? We are angry, refuse to talk, gossip up a storm about that person, and ice him or her with a vengeance. Not so, with Jesus.

“But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore And He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some [fish].’ So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. . . .Jesus said to them, ‘Come and eat breakfast.’” (John 21:4, 6, 9,12)

What a great story! Jesus came and found Peter. This is the God we love and serve, the One who desires so intensely to be with us that He comes to us even when we have sinned.

WORSHIP IN THE STORM

God uses our mistakes to purify our hearts and to make us stronger for His service. He takes our adversity of choice and writes a story for others to learn from, for future generations to remember. Jesus personally restored Peter, and Scripture records both sides of his story: the failure and, later, the success. These were recorded for our benefit that we might not allow failure or discouragement to rule, but walk in the light of His love. The adversity of choice is healed when we repent of our sin and accept the intimate care of Christ for our lives to begin again. It happened for Peter; it can happen for you. Peter wrote to warn all of us, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). No doubt he was remembering his own mistakes when he wrote these words. God used the adversity of choice in Peter's life to completely transform and embolden him in a way that he might never have known before. Peter was so impacted by the Lord's deep mercy and so intensely grateful for Christ that he ended up a martyr for His name, persecuted, then crucified. (Eusebius. *Church History: Book Two*, chapter 25)

Effectiveness and joy in ministry relates to the relational “health” of our faith and intimacy toward Jesus plus our standing strong against the confidence of the flesh and destructive, broad road of spiritual laziness. Let's believe God for ministry lives and homes built upon the joy-filled intimacy of Jesus!

- Read Romans 8:9 and Proverbs 4:23. What would a “spirit-controlled” life look like for you? What are some ways that you can guard your heart?
- Read Psalm 68:3, and 1 Corinthians 13:4-5. What are the results of the “spirit-filled life?” What emotions might you experience? What character qualities would you see in your relationships? How would those relationships with others change this week?

*Jay and Diane Strack, *Worship in the Storm* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Impact, 2006), used by permission.

Prayers to Offer

Thanksgiving

Thank You, Lord, that we can experience health and love, for You have rescued us from “this body of death” (Rom. 7:24).

Jesus, we are grateful that we can have joy, for “weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:5).

Dear God, we celebrate that our relationships can improve through the words we speak, for “pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones” (Prov. 16:24).

Confession

We often do not address the progression of a spiritual decline. Forgive us, Lord, for allowing darkness to enter our hearts.

We are guilty of not understanding that restoration is good news. Cleanse us, Dear God, for allowing “things” to replace our intimacy with Christ.

We often do not worship in the storm. Change us, Lord, and help us celebrate that You are purifying us, making us stronger for Your service.

Petition

“Let the righteous rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in him; let all the upright in heart praise him!” (Ps. 64:10)

Dear God, might we see others called to the ministry who “soar on wings like eagles . . . run and not grow weary . . . walk and not be faint” (Isa. 40:31).

Jesus, help us to celebrate more often with others, to “rejoice with those who rejoice” (Rom. 12:15).