

Equipped to recover from failure

We've all met people who want to be successful but I doubt if we've ever come across anyone whose ambition in life was to be a failure. Yet, failure happens - to all of us, in some shape or form. The question is, can we recover from it? I wonder if the apostle Peter, a committed follower of Jesus, asked the same question when he failed his Lord by denying he ever knew Him - not once, but three times.

But Peter didn't suddenly go from commitment to denial. In Luke's gospel chapter 24, we read there was a gradual progression that began with verbal support of Jesus¹, after which Peter followed far behind², then apparent coldness³ and, finally, verbal denial⁴.

Maybe you've seen this happen in your own life. Perhaps you can look back to a time when you were really fired up about living God's way. Anyone listening to you would conclude you were a strong follower of Jesus. As time went by, you continued to follow Jesus - but at a distance. You weren't quite as close to Him as you once were. Maybe you cooled off towards God. Instead of choosing to bridge the growing distance between yourself and Jesus, you stopped following Him and turned your attention to other ways of warming your cold heart. Then, one day, you found it wasn't just your lifestyle that denied Jesus, but, like Peter, your words denied him too.

Imagine how Peter must have felt between Good Friday, when Jesus was crucified, and Easter Sunday, when He was raised from the dead. Peter probably felt hopeless (no way to put things right - his Lord was dead); sick at heart (deeply regretted what he had done); and probably thoroughly depressed with the way things had turned out. Can you relate?

But this wasn't the end of the story for Peter. Jesus had work that needed to be done and He chose a man who knew what it was like to fail his Master. Nevertheless, Jesus turned this humiliation around in a way that Peter probably never expected.⁵

Jesus wasn't taken by surprise when Peter disowned Him and He's not taken by surprise when we fail Him, either. He knows what situations we will meet and how we will respond to them. He knows whether we will "turn back", like Peter, or "turn away", like Judas Iscariot. What about you? Are you someone who loves the Lord Jesus Christ but you've let Him down badly? Do you think, this time, you've well and truly blown it? Do you wonder if there is hope for you? Don't be like Judas Iscariot who showed remorse and even regret, but didn't turn back to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness that only He can give. But, if, like Peter, you turn back again to the Jesus you once followed closely, then you can be restored. Perhaps it will be a long road back, but look what we read in the book of James: "*Come near to God and he will come near to you*".⁶ He'll meet you on the way back!

Perhaps you're familiar with the story of the prodigal son - the boy who left home and lived a wild life and then realized how foolish he'd been and decided to return home. You know, for years I used to view this story as an example of someone who didn't know Jesus, coming to Him for the first time and, as such, entering into God's family. But when I looked at it more closely, I realized something that is very, very obvious - this was the story of a repentant son - the boy was already a member of the family and was returning to his father. Notice that the father did something unheard of in the culture of the day - he ran! Men in elevated positions in Jewish society didn't run in public, but the father's love for the returning son took precedence over everything. He met the son on his way back. What a picture this is of God's forgiving heart when we turn back to Him! Does this not dispel your fears that this time you've blown it and there's no hope for you? Don't wait a moment longer to return to God and His family.

¹ Luke 24:33

² verse 54

³ verse 55

⁴ verses 57, 58 and 60

⁵ John 21:15-17

⁶ James 4:8 (NIV)