

SUPPORT IN DIFFICULT TIMES



ARE YOU THINKING OF GIVING UP ON YOUR FAITH?

All Christian believers go through difficult times. Maybe after one year of having to deal with lockdown in its various forms you have just had enough. You can feel your mood just going down into the dumps and it seems as if the walls around you are becoming higher every day. Whatever may have happened that has tested you beyond what you may have thought is fair and are ready to give up, know this: God has not given up on you!

What do you think is the biggest way you could have disappointed God by giving up? Let us look at the life of Peter the apostle for a moment and then we will look at you.

Peter, the first-century apostle

Here was a man who followed Jesus with all his heart. He was a bit of a rough diamond though, rather impatient and impulsive and with a mood that would see-saw between incredible highs and sorrowful lows:

- He experienced the many miracles Jesus performed.
- One of these miracles struck closer to home when Jesus healed his mother-in-law (Mark 1:30).
- Then he became part of a miracle when we walked on water. Imagine that. He walked on water. But his faith wavered, and he sank before Jesus grabbed him. (Matthew 14:29)
- He was the one who made the proclamation that Jesus was indeed the Son of God (Matthew 16:16) but would later deny knowing Him.
- Jesus tells him that He would build His church on Peter, the rock (Matthew 16:18).
- A little while later the narrative continues, and Luke records words not found in Matthew's account:

³¹And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: ³²But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. – **Luke 22:31-32**

Peter would not have understood these words at the time. He figured that since he walked with Jesus, he had His protection and blessing. Here though Jesus was saying to him that he had to strengthen his brothers (the disciples and later converts to the Christian faith) *once he had been converted* – once he had been filled with the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

- When the heat was on, he denied even knowing the Man with whom he spent so much time with (Matthew 26:70). Did Jesus know that this would happen? Indeed. He even told Peter that he would deny Him:

³³Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. ³⁴Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto

thee, **That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.** – **Matthew 26:33-34**

Peter appeared to be a destroyed man; his faith shattered by his inability to stand true to his words uttered just a few hours before:

⁶⁹Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. ⁷⁰**But he denied before them all,** saying, I know not what thou sayest. ⁷¹And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. ⁷²**And again he denied with an oath,** I do not know the man. ⁷³And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. ⁷⁴Then began he to **curse and to swear,** saying, **I know not the man.** And immediately the cock crew. ⁷⁵And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly. – **Matthew 26:69-75**

Despite all the miracles, the words of authority spoken about him and the evidence in favour of Jesus, Peter failed Him. Again. He denied knowing Jesus in front of many witnesses, then he made an oath that he did not know Him, and the third time he even cursed and swore.

Yet, in His darkest hour, Jesus did not give up on Peter because He knew the greater plan for Peter's life and how his life would serve God's purpose as the foundation of the early church. Peter was still the rock as Jesus referred to him. He just needed to have his faith restored.

- We find the restoration of Peter's faith in John's gospel, in chapter 21:

¹⁵So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my lambs.** ¹⁶He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.** ¹⁷He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.** ¹⁸Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. ¹⁹This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. – **John 21:15-19**

Peter denied Jesus three times and now Jesus tells him three times to tend to His sheep, the church to come. When Peter was young, he did not really serve Jesus the way he should have. Let's say that this was a youth which had knowledge but lacked insight. When he is older, he has the knowledge of the true Jesus, as well as insight and wisdom to follow Him to the end, even to death. Jesus is pinning His hopes for the church and all believers in the hands of one man and He knows Peter will not let Him down again. Peter's favour with Jesus has been restored.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. – John 3:16

Peter did not know at the time when he told Jesus that he would not deny Him and was even prepared to die for Him (Matthew 26:35), that this would turn out to be true. John refers to this in the scripture quoted above:

¹⁸Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, **thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not.** – **John 21:18**

After a life of preaching the gospel, Peter was crucified, but upside down at his request. The highlighted text refers to this.

After Jesus' ascension, the disciples waited in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father:

⁴And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. ⁵For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. – **Acts 1:4-5**

They did this and then the following happened:

¹And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ²And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. ³And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. – **Acts 2:1-4**

This event led to Peter being the spokesman, as he was before, but this time with full conviction, having been filled with the power of the Holy Spirit:

¹⁴But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: ¹⁵For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; – **Acts 2:14-16**

From here on, the gospel spread rapidly, with Peter in the lead, and others would soon follow him, including you.

You, the 21st century Christian

Maybe you found this web page because you are going through your own ups and downs. Maybe your downs are more than the ups. Maybe you feel that God has forgotten about you because you have forgotten about Him. If so, then this is your comfort:

^{5b}for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. – **Hebrews 13:5b**

Him not leaving you is not dependent on you temporarily leaving Him. This jewel could almost get lost in context of the rest of the writer's letter to the Hebrews. However, it is a

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reference to an Old Testament scripture, and a solid reminder of what Moses was told as encouragement:

⁶Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. –
Deuteronomy 31:6

Do you see the similarity here? The writer's words in Hebrews 13 were based on solid, proven, and reliable history! He says He will not forsake you. Think of the meaning for a moment. Forsake means to leave someone on their own when they need you desperately. Still not convinced? Contemplate this:

¹⁶Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me. – **Isaiah 49:16**

How many times have you looked at the palms of your hands today? Without thinking about it, you looked at them many times today. Every time God opens his hands, He thinks about you. Your name is engraved, not just written, on the palms of His hands. Right there. Our palms are super sensitive. They allow us to gently hold or caress, or to firmly grab. Whether right now He needs to gently hold you, or grab you out of a situation you got yourself into, His thoughts are on you. In addition, He sees your walls – those walls that you maybe put up yourself to protect yourself from the world, or the walls that are situations you face and do need see capable of getting over. He knows about them and He will break them down for you. You do not need to build walls around you – God is your protection:

⁷The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. ⁸The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore. – **Psalms 121:7-8**

Maybe your situation is the result of sin (denial, cursing, and sinning?), and for most of us this will be the case. I urge you to seek the Lord in prayer, investigate your own life and see if there is unrepented sin in your life. Then repent of it:

⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. – **1 John 1:9**

God wants to restore you, no matter how many times you have denied, cursed or sinned. His forgiveness is total and unconditional. Just keep on loving Him as He loves you. Whatever you do, hang on to your faith. These are perilous times, and we will be tested but not more than we can endure. It will be worth it in the end.