

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME THREE

STUDY THIRTEEN

Peter's Darkest Hour

Mark 14:53–54, 66–72

Rather than clucking our tongues or wagging our fingers at Peter, may we realize that God's Word is a mirror telling us about ourselves.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WE'VE all done things we regret. Walking through our hall of memories, we see the downcast face of a person we offended. We feel the anger that erupted inside us like a volcano and hear the fiery words that flowed from our lips. We relive the time we acted out of fear and fled when we wished we had stood our ground. Or maybe we boasted when we wished we had been humble. Or we gave in to some temptation when we wished we had stayed strong.

We'd like to erase these failures from our memory. But, like open wounds that refuse to heal, they remain painful parts of who we are.

What does God think about our past? Certainly, He knows what we said and did, for “nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes” (Hebrews 4:13). Restoring us is the reason Christ came. He bore the guilt of our sin on the cross, and by trusting in Christ, we can receive His pardon. God's grace saves us, redeems us, and sets us free from our bondage to sin. “By his wounds [we] are healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

But what about our painful memories? Thankfully, God's grace can heal our memories too.

As Mark's gospel has unfolded, we have watched the lives of Jesus' followers—real men and women with strengths and weaknesses. We've observed their best moments and their worst, and we see God redeeming and transforming them. Their life stories give us hope, not because they were perfect but because they found healing and restoration in Christ's love.

In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll see Peter in his worst moment. But we'll also see the light of God's profound mercy and abundant grace shining over Peter and guiding him through his darkest hour into the light on the other side.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Humble your heart before the Lord by acknowledging how much you depend on Him.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Peter has commanded our attention since he first appeared in the pages of this gospel. His bold faith stood out when he left his fishing business to follow Jesus (Mark 1:16–18). His confession that Jesus is “the Messiah” still echoes through time (8:29).

Along with the admirable moments, however, came the embarrassments. He reprimanded Jesus for foretelling His death (8:32). On the night He was arrested, Jesus told His disciples they would scatter like sheep. Peter brashly retorted, “Even if everyone else deserts you, I never will” (14:29). Jesus even warned Peter, “I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you even know me” (14:30).

But did Peter heed the warning? Did he even hear it? What did Peter blurt out in [14:31](#)?

Note the emphatic placement of that pronoun you in the Greek. “You, Peter. You’ll deny Me. Not once, not twice, three times. You will.” Look at the first word of the next verse, “But” [NASB]. There it is again. Peter is too busy talking. “Peter kept saying insistently” [NASB]. The word means “with vehemence, with passion.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Just a few hours later, Peter probably wished he could take back his words! Let’s look closer at what happened.

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Observation: Peter Denies Jesus and Repents

Observe Mark's account in [Mark 14:53–54, 66–72](#), reading it in an engaging way and paying close attention to every word. Look for what's written before and after. This foundational first step of the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method helps you grasp the message and its context.¹

The Place Peter Went—Mark 14:53–54

Jesus endured six trials after His arrest in the garden of Gethsemane. The scene in our passage centers on Jesus' second trial, which was in Caiaphas' house. Caiaphas was the high priest and moderator of the Sanhedrin—the Jewish Supreme Court. It was around three o'clock on a chilly morning. A few guards were warming themselves by the fire.

Where was Peter according to [Mark 14:53–54](#)? Why did Peter follow the guards who had arrested Jesus? What do you think he hoped to do in the courtyard?

The Words Peter Said—Mark 14:66–72

In a way, both Jesus and Peter were undergoing trials. Accusers hurled charges at both men, and juries (of sorts) declared verdicts. Jesus' trial occurred “on the record” before high-ranking officials, while Peter's trial took place unofficially in private conversations among servants. Fill in the blanks with Peter's interactions and denials in [Mark 14:66–72](#).

Question	Denial One	Denial Two	Denial Three
Who spoke to whom?			
What was Peter's response?			
What happened after Peter's denial?			

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The Shame Peter Felt—Mark 14:72

Read [Mark 14:72](#) and [Luke 22:61](#). What did Peter do after Jesus' words flashed through his mind? What poignant detail did Luke mention? What do you imagine Jesus communicating to Peter in that moment?

Only Luke adds this little tidbit. There's a break in the crowd and the face of Jesus penetrates the darkness and Jesus and Peter connect eyes. What an epochal moment! He looked at Peter. That warning came back. Peter went out and literally we read he burst into tears. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Peter's Darkest Hour

Interestingly, in the years that followed, Peter didn't cover up his failure. As Mark's primary source, Peter willingly allowed Mark to include it in his gospel. What is the significance of Mark hearing this information from Peter himself?

Read [Mark 14:53–54, 66–72](#) in the MSG and J. B. Phillips Bible versions. Consult your Bible-study resources, Pastor Chuck's commentary [Insights on Mark](#), or [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#). What lessons did Peter's failure in the courtyard convey to Mark's original audience of persecuted Christians in Rome? What was the meaning of Peter's calling down divine curses on himself?

What happened is that he called down an oath from heaven, worse than profanity. He placed himself under God's curse if he were lying to them. Interestingly, the argument stopped. It must have convinced them. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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How do you think Peter felt in his darkest hour? How would you have felt?



Correlation: Our Failures, God's Profound Mercy, and God's Abundant Grace

Abraham, the father of our faith, lied to save his own skin. Moses, the man who saw God face-to-face, disobeyed God and struck the rock. Jonah, God's prophet, ran away when God sent him to Nineveh. Failing grades appear on the spiritual scorecards of even God's most famous servants.

What other men and women like Peter can you name in Scripture who failed, yet God still used them? If you need help finding one, look up [1 Timothy 1:12–17](#). How do these accounts showcase the mercy of God?

Stamped on every story of human failure, God's holy ink inscribes His grace. How would you describe Peter's restoration in [John 21:1–19](#)? What does the dialogue between Jesus and Peter, after Peter's denials, teach us about God's patience and deep love for us? Which account in the book of Acts encourages you the most concerning God's grace at work in the life of Peter?

How easy to leave Peter here, bitterly weeping, filled with shame. But Jesus doesn't. Within a matter of a few days, He's calling Peter to His side, saying "Do you love Me?" Three times as if to say to Peter, "Get rid of the memory. Get it out of your emotions. I will use you." Peter becomes the stabilizing presence of the early church. Of all people, how appropriate. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: Pause and Remember!

Peter's knees buckling under the pressures of that night and his tears bursting with grief convey some important lessons to remember.

First, *remember the warnings you forgot*. At times, relatives, close friends, and mentors spot some cracks in our character and warn us to pay attention to these areas. What warnings does the Holy Spirit bring to your memory right now? Why not welcome the Holy Spirit's transforming work in that area?

First, the warnings came from home; your mom or dad was good at warning. If you were in the military, warnings came from your superior. If you went on to college, you had mentors who saw flaws in your character. They warned you. "You need to watch out for this." I can still hear some of these warnings in my mind. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Second, *remember the place you went*. One decision follows another, and we find ourselves warming at some fire of compromise. What specific situation or relationship in your life resembles Peter's courtyard predicament?

Let your memory go there. It wasn't a fire inside a courtyard in Judea. No, it was maybe a bar. Maybe in a neighbor's home. Maybe at one of your children's gatherings. Some place where you hid in the shadows of silence or you said what you should never have said. Just remember. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Third, *remember the words you spoke*. Think of some words that you've spoken that you regret. Invite Jesus into that memory. Confess and repent. Express your gratitude for the Lord's forgiveness and restoration.

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Today, I invite you to leave that memory with the only One who can remove it from you, who died that you might really live. Had He not, you would have just heard my last sermon. I am so unworthy to speak for Him except for the memories that have been removed and the shame taken away.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

All of us are broken people—we fall short of God's standards in our motives, speech, attitudes, and actions. The memories of our failures often haunt us. Let's turn our eyes upon the cross of Jesus, who suffered for us. Let's allow His blood to wash away our guilt and shame, and let's experience the healing cure of His glorious love and grace.



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I leave the memory of my failures with the only One whose blood can wash me clean. I confess my sin. You are faithful and just to forgive me and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. Thank You for removing my shame! Thank You for restoration and unfailing grace. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](https://www.insight.org/how-does-pastor-chuck-swindoll-study-the-bible)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).

For the 2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2011, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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