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Denied

Denying Jesus leads to sorrow and guilt.

LUKE 22:54-62

Some of the most haunting words Jesus ever uttered were about denying Him. He taught His disciples that whoever denied Him before men, He would deny before God the Father. With Jesus being our intercessor before the throne of God, these words are hard to forget. It is no surprise then that denying Jesus leads to sorrow and guilt. As Jesus faced the cross, Peter experienced the pain of denying Him. From Peter we learn about the heartbreak of denying Christ and the hope of forgiveness in the aftermath of doing so.

Reflect on a time you were abandoned by someone you considered a friend. What one word would you use to define the emotions you felt?

UNDERSTAND THE **CONTEXT**

LUKE 22:54-71

The willingness of Jesus to face the cross stands in stark contrast to the weakness of His disciples (Luke 22:39-62). Most notably was Simon Peter, who betrayed Jesus three times on the night of Jesus' arrest.

Peter was one of Jesus' first followers and became a pillar in the church (Gal. 2:9). He not only followed Jesus but also became a spokesperson for the Twelve (Luke 8:45; 12:41). It was Peter who first confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son God (Matt. 16:16-17). Peter was also part of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples, along with James and John. It was Peter and John who were given the task of preparing Jesus' final Passover meal (Luke 22:8). At one point, Peter boasted he would never forsake Jesus, even if everyone else did. In the hours that followed, we find Peter denying Jesus three times. Fear of the implications of being associated with Him cracked the "rock" (Matt. 16:18-19).

Though Peter was unfaithful, the resurrected Jesus forgave, restored, and re-commissioned him for the mission (John 21:6,15-17). In the Book of Acts, Peter is seen as a leader in the church and in the expansion of the gospel. Despite Peter's sometimes fickle faith, God still used him in a mighty way in His kingdom.

As the apostle Paul reminded us in 2 Timothy 2:13, "if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself." Peter may have denied Christ, but in the power of God's grace he persevered. Moreover, because of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, the Father would not deny Peter in eternity. Like us, Peter was a great sinner. But our Christ is an even greater Savior.

**Of what was Peter accused in Luke 22:54-62, and how did he respond?
What did Jesus do the third time Peter denied knowing Him?**

EXPLORE THE TEXT

DISTANCE (LUKE 22:54-55)

⁵⁴ **They seized him, led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. Meanwhile Peter was following at a distance.**

⁵⁵ **They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, and Peter sat among them.**

VERSE 54

The plot against Jesus grew in intensity since His arrival in Jerusalem (Luke 19:47; 22:2). In the previous verses, we witness the arrival of the religious, military, and political leaders to arrest Jesus. Luke identified them as chief priests, temple police, and the elders (22:52). The words for **seized** and **led ... away** convey the sense that the guards used force to arrest Jesus, although He did not struggle.

In verse 54 we learn that **the high priest** orchestrated the whole ordeal, since Jesus was taken to his **house**. The high priest at that time was Joseph Caiaphas, who ruled from AD 18-36. The house of the high priest was most likely a villa or a palace, with a generously sized courtyard.

At this point Jesus was being prepared to go before the Roman governor, Pilate, with a charge of blasphemy. Again, Luke was informing us that the religious and political authorities were working together to bring this saga to an end. All of the disciples, except for Peter, had disappeared in the dark of night, just as Jesus' accusers had appeared. Peter had promised to stay with Jesus through this trial, and he alone remained (22:33). We are told that Peter followed **at a distance**.

We do not know Peter's motivation in following Jesus to this place. It could have been curious fear or a timid attempt to keep his word. Matthew 26:58 simply states that Peter wanted to see the outcome of these events. Nevertheless, we will soon see that Peter's courageous commitment to follow Jesus to the end turned out to be an empty claim. The narrator tells us that Peter stayed a safe distance away to observe but not be implicated with Jesus.

How does distancing oneself from Jesus increase the probability of unfaithfulness?

VERSE 55

Luke set the scene by informing us that Jesus' captors ***lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down*** around it to keep warm in the cold of this spring evening. Peter ***sat among them***, squarely in the company of Jesus' arrest party. He attempted to blend into the crowd, hoping to remain unnoticed.

There will be situations where our fidelity to Christ will falter.

We may have moments when we try to hide our Christian identity in an effort to blend into the world. But God calls His children to be light in a dark world. What good is a light if it is covered for no one to see? There will be situations where our fidelity to Christ will falter. But thanks be to God, our identity is not ultimately grounded in what we do, but in what Christ has done. Like Peter, we may find ourselves behaving in ways that are shameful. Yet God's grace is free to all who believe, and His mercies are new every morning.

What are the dangers of Christians attempting to blend in to an unbelieving crowd?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Evangelism and Missions*

It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ (2 Tim. 4:5).

DENIAL (LUKE 22:56-60a)

⁵⁶ When a servant saw him sitting in the light, and looked closely at him, she said, “This man was with him too.” ⁵⁷ But he denied it: “Woman, I don’t know him.” ⁵⁸ After a little while, someone else saw him and said, “You’re one of them too.” “Man, I am not!” Peter said. ⁵⁹ About an hour later, another kept insisting, “This man was certainly with him, since he’s also a Galilean.” ^{60a} But Peter said, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

VERSES 56-57

Peter did not remain unnoticed for long; *the light* of the fire exposed him in this darkest hour. Peter had claimed loyalty to Jesus in private; now his loyalty was about to be tested in public. The first person who identified Peter in the dim firelight was *a servant* woman. She was the same servant who served as doorkeeper and let Peter inside at the request of John (John 18:16-17). As Peter entered, he may have been somewhat hidden by his cloak and the darkness.

After looking *closely at him*, the woman called him out as a disciple of Jesus. It was Peter who first confessed Jesus as the Messiah (Luke 9:20). But when identified as one of Jesus’ followers, he claimed to never have known Him. This is an absolute denial as he disputed her claim. Again, this was one of Peter’s darkest moments and would haunt him in the days ahead.

Perhaps Peter gave into fear at this moment. Perhaps, in the wake of all these events, he began to doubt all that the Lord had told him. Jesus’ followers hoped that Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel. Now, the prospects of this promise seemed as dim as the dark night sky. With Jesus’ imminent death approaching, it seems that the faith and courage of Peter was dying also. The word *denied* only appears in verse 57; after this, Luke simply recorded what Peter said at each attempt to identify him as one of the twelve (vv. 58-60a). However, his denial is clearly assumed each time.

VERSES 58-60a

Peter then drew attention from *someone else* who said, “*You’re one of them too.*” This implies that the crowd was well aware of Jesus’ disciples. They had been closely associated with Jesus and His ministry. As the old saying goes, “You’re known by the

company you keep.” Once again, Peter claimed he was not one of Jesus’ beloved followers. In this moment he did not want to be known as part of Jesus’ company. Peter’s reply denied not only his association with Jesus but also his association with the other disciples. He was now in full self-preservation mode. He abandoned his Lord and betrayed his closest friends.

How do the people with whom one associates impact how others might view that person?

About an hour later, Peter dug his feet in deeper. A third person pressed in and insisted with certainty: **this man** (Peter) **was certainly with him** (Jesus). One of the proofs offered is that he was **a Galilean**. Luke provided a little more context to this qualifier in Acts 2:7. Presumably, Galileans had distinct clothing and identifiable accents. In comparison to those who were gathered in the high priest’s courtyard, his rural accent and clothing must have stuck out. Yet still, Peter claimed that the accusations were ungrounded. He claimed, **I don’t know what you’re talking about!** For a third time, Peter demonstrated an unwillingness to acknowledge that he knew Jesus. The pressure of the moment cracked Peter, the rock.

Can you imagine the weight of grief that was building in Peter’s heart? How could he deny Jesus? He had followed Jesus intimately for three years; now being intimidated, he walked away in shame.

DID YOU KNOW?

According to John 18:26, the third accusation against Peter (Luke 22:59) came from a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off.

DEFEAT (LUKE 22:60b-62)

^{60b} **Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed.**

⁶¹ **Then the Lord turned and looked at Peter. So Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.”** ⁶² **And he went outside and wept bitterly.**

VERSES 60b-61

The crow of *a rooster* confirmed Jesus’ prediction that these things would take place just as He said (Luke 22:34). The crowing happened *immediately*. If it happened half an hour later, Peter might not have made the connection between the rooster and Jesus’ warning. The fact that it occurred *while he was still speaking* left no doubt as to what was happening. Peter must have cringed at the sound. To make matters worse, Jesus and Peter made eye contact. This informs us that Peter denied Jesus in His presence.

The term *turned* is a participle and could be translated, “turning, the Lord looked.” Jesus’ act of turning shows He was engaged with the authorities and guards. Yet He knew what was happening with Peter, so He physically turned toward him.

The term *looked* conveys the idea of looking directly and intently.

Though more than a glance, Jesus’ look is not characterized as a glare or scowl. His eyes probably conveyed more sadness than accusation. When Peter saw Jesus looking at him, he *remembered the word of the Lord* that Peter would deny Him.

The victorious Christian life isn’t the sinless life; it’s the repentant life.

VERSE 62

The aftermath of Peter’s actions were painful, and he *wept bitterly*. The language used to describe Peter’s bitter weeping is used elsewhere to refer to the grief over someone’s death (8:52). This was intense emotion.

Perhaps Jesus’ look provided some sense of assurance to preserve Peter. Later on in 24:12, Luke recorded Peter as running to examine the claims of an empty tomb. This was a sign of hope. In the end, John informs us that Jesus forgave and restored Peter (John 21).

The failure of Peter, along with the testimony of Acts reassures us that God’s grace is greater than our failures. Jesus is faithful, even when His followers fail in faithlessness. This was not only good news for Peter; this is good news for all of us. Peter’s failure and subsequent restoration through repentance and grace reminds us that the victorious Christian life isn’t the sinless life; it’s the repentant life.

**What role does accountability play in receiving grace?
How is accountability a function of God’s love?**

BIBLE SKILL: *Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.*

Imagine yourself in Peter’s place. Reflect on the passage again, using your name instead of Peter’s. How do you feel as you read these words? Create a two-column chart. Label one column: “Faithful.” Label the second column: “Failure.” List some situations in your life that would fit into each column. What emotions can you identify as you think of each item?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers must be careful to not distance themselves from Jesus.
- Believers can expect people to identify them as followers of Jesus.
- Believers are held accountable when they deny knowing Jesus.

Name several spiritual disciplines that help us remain faithful to Jesus. Which spiritual discipline do you need to be more intent on developing in your life and how?

What actions do you need to take to more readily be identified as a believer of Jesus? Who needs to know that you are a follower of Jesus?

As a group, discuss some practical ways you can hold one another accountable in your faithfulness to Jesus Christ. What actions might the group need to take in light of this discussion?

PRAYER NEEDS
