

**“That Sinking Feeling”**  
**Matthew 14:22-33**

**22** Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.

**23** After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.

Later that night, he was there alone,

**24** and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

**25** Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

**26** When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified.

“It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

**27** But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

**28** “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

**29** “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

**30** But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

**31** Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

“You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

**32** And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.

**33** Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

**Introduction**

*Peanuts* cartoonist Charles Schulz often reflected on the sadness of life through his characters. He seemed to love losers; even Charlie Brown’s baseball idol, Joe Shlabotnik, was the worst player in the pros. Every major character has an unrequited love — Charlie Brown and the little red-haired girl, Lucy and Schroeder, Linus and Miss Othmar. Even Snoopy gets dumped at the altar. Schulz himself had his heart broken by a real-life red-haired girl. He infused his *Peanuts* cartoons with his lifelong feelings of depression and insecurity. In several cartoons, two characters are outside, at night, staring at a field of stars. Charlie Brown says, “Let’s go inside and watch television... I’m beginning to feel insignificant.”

In the New Testament, Peter could have been a *Peanuts* character. He failed again and again in his faith and trust in Jesus. At Jesus’ invitation, he actually tried walking on the water and then began to sink. Certainly not a piece of perfection! But, from his many failings, the next time and the next time, Peter learned valuable lessons that would serve him and his Lord in the years to come.

Everyone experiences failure. And that sinking feeling of failure can hit us hard. The failure of a significant relationship or friendship, especially one that you messed up. Relationships fail all the time. It’s easier to brush off and move on when the other person was mostly to blame. But when you only have yourself to blame, you have feelings that stick with you.

There's failure in career or career choice. Someone said, "If you're still holding down the first job you've ever had, there's roughly a 99 percent chance you're not doing what you ought to be doing. Maybe you're that one-in-a-million statistic who got lucky, but most people need to go through some trial and error.

Or, have you experienced the stress that comes with financial trouble? Buried in the APR on credit cards or student loans? Or, failure in accomplishments, trying your very best and realizing your very best isn't good enough?

Someone made these observations about our human experiences: The early bird may get the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese... Borrow money from a pessimist; they don't expect it back... If at first you don't succeed, destroy all evidence that you tried... If at first you don't succeed, then skydiving isn't for you.

### **I. Old Testament Failure**

The Bible is filled with accounts of God's people succeeding and failing in their faith relationship with God. Take Old Testament Elijah for instance. In I Kings 18, the Lord used Elijah in a powerful way against King Ahab and the prophets of Baal. He took on four hundred opponents along with this evil king of Israel, proving that Yahweh is the only true God. The very name Elijah (Eliyahu) means "Yahweh is my God."

But, then, in I Kings 19, Elijah is threatened by Queen Jezebel. In fear, he ran for his life. Elijah was sure he was a failure when he famously said, "It is enough, Lord" (I've had it!). "Take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors" (I Kings 19:4). But, God didn't take away his life. The Lord sent an angel to bake him a cake of bread and leave a jar of cold water. And then, Elijah lay down to sleep. Pastor John Ortberg likens this to how you treat a cranky toddler: "Have a snack, take a nap, and we'll talk when you're a little more composed."

In times of great success, it's not hard to believe that God is present. But, in times of great failure, it's easy to assume that God isn't there.

The story of Elijah continues: The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So, he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God (this is all in I Kings 19). There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a “still small voice.”

Elijah learned in his failure as well as his success that he was loved and cared for by God even when he was hiding in the cave. Have you learned this? Are you learning this in your faith and life? Or, are you hiding in a cave somewhere?

Perhaps you’ve lost your job or are under financial pressure. Maybe your dreams about family life have been shattered. Maybe it involves a physical condition: you’ve lost your health or simply find yourself alone. Welcome to the human race!

In the Book of Psalms, there are several categories. The most popular is the “complaint” psalm. Sometimes I think it’s my spiritual gift! It’s quite natural to complain to God about failures in life.

Adam and Eve failed. They tried to hide. Yet they were promised redemption. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all failed, yet the covenant would be fulfilled. Moses failed, yet the people were freed and entered the Promised Land. David failed, yet the promised kingdom reached the heights of peace and security. Some would say that Jesus failed. But his failure (The Cross) was God’s greatest success (The Resurrection).

## **II. New Testament Failure**

Here in the New Testament, we come to Peter. What a failure he was! Imagine what his self-talk could have been like. “Peter, you just aren’t good enough. You’ll never improve. You failed again! O you of little faith...” Have you felt the shame, the blame, the fear or denial of this voice in your head?

Have you gone off by yourself as Peter did when he heard the rooster begin to crow? He knew his greatest failure in denying that he even knew Jesus. Or, like Elijah, are you hiding out in your cave listening to self-accusations?

I’m told that failures take on a life of their own because the brain remembers incomplete tasks or failures longer than success or completed activity. In psychology, it’s called the “Zeigarnik effect.” When a project or a thought is completed, the brain places it in a special memory as bits and pieces of the achieved situation begin to decay. But failures have no closure. The brain continues to spin the memory, trying to come up with ways to fix the mess and move it from active to inactive status.

In John 21, after the resurrection, Jesus three times said to Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” This after Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus before the crucifixion. Jesus restored Peter. Just like in the wind-swept waves, Jesus saved Peter.

In John's letter to the church, he writes what he and Peter and the disciples learned from their own failures. In I John 3, the Bible says, "We will be confident when we stand before the Lord, even if our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (I John 3:19-20).

### **Conclusion**

I recently read the tragic experience of their 13-year-old daughter Taylor dying in a skiing accident. A week before their trip to Colorado to ski, Taylor wrote: "I am outgoing and friendly. I say with pride that I am Christian. I wonder how long is forever. I cry at the thought of losing a member of my family. I worry about failing. I dream about becoming a teacher. I try to make every day like my last." - Taylor Paige Storch.

In the midst of their shock and grief, Tara and Todd Storch decided to donate their daughter's organs to people in critical need. Tara had one request: to hear the heart of her daughter again.

Weeks later, they flew from Dallas to Phoenix to the home of Patricia Winters. Patricia's heart began to fail five years earlier. The only hope now was a heart transplant. Patricia was the recipient of Taylor's heart. After a long embrace, Patricia handed a stethoscope to these grieving parents. When they listened to the healthy rhythm, whose heart did they hear? It lives in a different body, but the heart is the heart of their child. In re-telling this story, Max Lucado asks, "And when God hears your heart, does he not hear the still-beating heart of his Son?" As Paul wrote, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." And, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27). From *Taylor's Gift: A Courageous Story of Giving Life and Renewing Hope*. See [www.TaylorsGift.org](http://www.TaylorsGift.org).

When you have that sinking feeling, remember God and Elijah. Remember Jesus and Peter. Remember the Cross and the Resurrection.

When Peter saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him... When they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." Let us pray with and for one another.

### **James 5:13-16**

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.

And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up.

If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.

Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.