



**Unit 2:** The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth  
**Sermon Series Title:** Trust His Word  
**Sermon 5:** When You've Turned Back  
**Bible Passage:** Luke 22:31-32

### **Background/Context**

I have a friend who left the ministry. He made some mistakes years ago. He didn't keep his promises. He hasn't served since. Many people, including me, have urged him to put his gifts to work again for God, but he will not. He doesn't believe that he can be restored after failing.

Is failure fatal in the Christian life? We should never take unfaithfulness to Christ lightly. Lives are scarred, reputations tainted, and opportunities lost when His people fail Him. We must take failure seriously, but we must take our Lord's power to restore us to service even more seriously.

We see an illustration of Christ's power to restore those who fail in the life of Simon Peter. In the Upper Room, as Jesus told His disciples that He would be betrayed, tried, and put to death, He also told Peter that his loyalty and courage would be tested and that he would fail. But even before Peter denied Him, Jesus saw beyond Peter's failure to a new beginning, Peter's greatest days of service.

Christ will do the same for you if you will allow Him. He sees beyond your failure to a new beginning, a life restored to His service.

### **A. You Will Be Sifted (Luke 22:31)**

Wheat is sifted to remove the edible kernel of wheat from the useless chaff that surrounds it. In Jesus' day, sifting was done by beating the grains of wheat on a hard surface, then throwing them into the air. The breeze would blow the chaff away while the heavier kernels of wheat would fall back to the ground.

Jesus told Peter that in the hours that lay ahead, he and the other disciples would be sifted. Satan, often described as "the accuser," would test them to see how much of their commitment to Christ would be blown away by hardship and how much would prove to have spiritual substance.

If you are a Christian, you will be sifted. Your commitment to Christ will be tested to see how much will stand and how much will be blown away. Such testing is not easy, but it can do you great good. This sifting of the soul will show you that God has put truths in your life that cannot be blown away. You will also see the many ways that you can fail.

Seeing the chaff of your heart blow away may make you wonder if you can ever serve Christ again. When times of sifting come, you need to know what Jesus is doing for you.

**Application Point:** Can you remember a time when you felt like your soul was being sifted? What did you learn about yourself and your faith? What truths stood firm in your life? What wrong ideas, shallow commitments, and easy words were blown away? Did

you feel that your failures marked the end of your service to Christ, or did you believe that Jesus could use even your failures to give you a new beginning?

### **B. Jesus Is Praying that Your Faith Will Not Fail (Luke 22:32a)**

I can't count the times when I've stood at the door of our home—preparing to join a family in crisis, attend a controversial church meeting, or confront an erring brother—and my wife Angela has hugged me and said, "I'll be praying for you until this is finished." Knowing of her prayerful support strengthened me to serve.

Jesus told Peter that when his time of testing came, He would be praying for him in a specific way, "that your faith may not fail" (v. 32). What did Jesus mean? Was He praying that Peter's faith would stand the test of those who recognized him to be one of the Twelve? If that were the case, then Jesus' prayer wasn't answered. Peter denied Him three times, just as Jesus predicted.

Then what did He mean? I believe that Jesus prayed that Peter wouldn't lose faith in His love for those who underestimate the challenge of discipleship and make promises they can't keep. He also wanted Peter to remember His ability to restore those who fail to display a life of faithfulness.

Jesus is also praying that your faith will not fail. When your time of testing comes, you may deny that you know Him through your words or your actions. But He is praying that you will trust His love for you and His readiness to restore you to a place of service.

**Application Point:** Has Jesus' prayer been answered in your life? When you fail, do you trust His love for you and His desire to reclaim you as His servant? When you see others fail in the Christian life, do you treat them as though their failure is fatal, or do you allow Christ's prayer to be answered through your efforts to reclaim the fallen to faithful service?

### **C. When You Turn Back, You Can Strengthen Others (Luke 22:32b)**

I stood outside a hospital room and heard the cries of my daughter. She was in great pain. Hours later, I heard another sound—the voice of my grandson. Her pain had given birth to a new life.

God is great enough to take the terrible pain of failure and use it to bring new life to us and others. Jesus told Simon that when he returned, he would have a special ministry to other Christians, a testimony and an understanding that would strengthen them. Peter, the outspoken bombastic apostle whose words were often bigger than his actions, would return to the circle of the apostles as a true brother, a brother who knew that all Christians fail—and that God keeps the treasure of the gospel in plain clay jars (see 2 Cor. 4:7). He would learn that Christians serve, not because of their status or success, but only because Christ sees beyond our failures to the wiser humbler servants we can be when we return to Him.

**Application Point:** Do you believe that your past failures disqualify you from serving Christ? What Jesus said to Simon Peter, He says to you. You can return and do so as a better servant. What has the pain of missed opportunities and misspoken words taught

you about yourself? What have you learned about Christ's faithful love? Who can you strengthen by sharing how Christ has restored you?