

Seven Steps in Peter's Fall

Part 1 of 2 · How a bold disciple slid, one small step at a time, into denying Jesus

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:12

AT A GLANCE

BIG IDEA	Peter didn't fall all at once. He slid down seven steps: doubting, boasting, sleeping, striking out, following at a distance, sitting with the wrong crowd, and finally denying Jesus. Seeing the steps helps us stop the slide early.
SCRIPTURE	Matthew 14:28-31; 16:21-23 · Mark 14:27-31, 37 · John 18:10 · Luke 22:31-62 · 1 Corinthians 10:12
LENGTH	About 25 minutes; pair with Part 2, "Seven Steps in Peter's Restoration"
BEST FOR	Middle school and high school
YOU WILL NEED	Bibles and a staircase drawn on the whiteboard with seven steps going down

Start here: nobody falls off a cliff on purpose

Peter was the boldest of the disciples. He walked on water, confessed Jesus as the Christ, and promised to die for Him. Yet on the night Jesus was arrested, Peter swore three times that he didn't even know Him. How did that happen?

It didn't happen all at once. Big falls usually start with small steps. Draw a staircase going down, and label each step as we go.

1 He doubts

When Jesus walked on the water, Peter said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water" (Matthew 14:28). He stepped out and walked! But when he saw the wind, he got scared and began to sink. Jesus caught him and said, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (14:31).

Later, when Jesus explained that He must suffer and die, Peter rebuked Him. Jesus answered, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (16:23). Doubt starts when we look at the storm, or at our own ideas, instead of at Jesus.

2 He boasts

At the Last Supper, Jesus warned that all the disciples would stumble. Peter insisted, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be" (Mark 14:29). When Jesus told him he would deny Him three times, Peter said even more strongly, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" (14:31).

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." **1 CORINTHIANS 10:12**

Confidence in ourselves is dangerous. The moment we think, "That could never happen to me," we stop being careful.

3 He sleeps

In Gethsemane, Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to stay awake and pray with Him. Three times He came back and found them sleeping. "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour?" (Mark 14:37). Then He warned, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation" (14:38).

Peter skipped the prayer that would have prepared him for the test. Paul says, "it is high time to awake out of sleep" (Romans 13:11). Spiritual sleepiness, skipping time with God, leaves us unprepared.

4 He strikes out

When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Peter drew a sword and cut off the right ear of the high priest's servant, Malchus (John 18:10). Jesus told him to put the sword away, and then healed the man's ear (Luke 22:51).

Peter tried to fight in his own strength, the very night he hadn't prayed. When we neglect prayer, we often react in anger and do things our own way.

5 He follows at a distance

"Having arrested Him, they led Him and brought Him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed at a distance" (Luke 22:54). He still wanted to be near Jesus, but not too near. Close enough to see, far enough not to be identified.

That's where many students live: not rejecting Jesus, but keeping Him at arm's length so no one at school notices.

6 He sits with the ungodly

In the courtyard, people "kindled a fire... and sat down together, Peter sat among them" (Luke 22:55). He warmed himself at the enemy's fire, trying to blend in with the crowd that had just arrested his Lord.

Psalm 1:1 describes the slide perfectly: walking, then standing, then sitting with the ungodly. Where we sit, and who we sit with, matters.

7 He denies the Lord

A servant girl said, "This man was also with Him." Peter said, "Woman, I do not know Him" (Luke 22:56-57). Then again. Then a third time, with cursing and swearing (Matthew 26:74). Immediately the rooster crowed. "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter... So Peter went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61-62).

BACKGROUND FOR THE LEADER

Jesus had warned Peter ahead of time: "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). Notice "when," not "if." Jesus already knew Peter would fall, and already planned to restore him. That's the bridge to Part 2.

Where are you on the staircase?

Look at the seven steps. Most of us can find ourselves somewhere on them. The good news is that you can stop the slide at any step. Turn back to Jesus right where you are. And even if you've hit the bottom, the story isn't over. Peter's tears were the beginning of his restoration, and next time we'll see how Jesus brought him all the way back.

TALK IT OVER

1. Which step surprised you most? Why?
2. Why is boasting ("That could never happen to me") so dangerous?
3. How did skipping prayer in the garden set Peter up for failure later that night?
4. What does "following at a distance" look like for students today?
5. Which step are you closest to right now? What would it look like to turn back to Jesus today?

TAKE IT HOME

Draw the seven steps in your journal. Circle the one you're most tempted by, and write one specific way to stop the slide there (for example, setting a daily prayer time, choosing who you sit with, or speaking up for Jesus). Then read Luke 22:31-34 and thank Jesus that He prays for you.

Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

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