

The Forging of a True Warrior

Luke 22:31–38

There is one story from Michael Jordan's life that has become almost legendary, because it lit the competitive fire everyone came to know.

It involves another high school basketball player you've probably never heard of—Leroy Smith. During Jordan's Sophomore year, the varsity list went up on the wall.

Leroy Smith's name was on it.
Michael Jordan's name was not.

Jordan went home, cried in his room, and from that day forward turned every slight, every doubt, every “not quite good enough” into fuel.

Twenty-eight years later, on the Hall of Fame stage, he looked straight at Leroy—sitting in the audience because Jordan had flown him there—and said with a grin,

“He started the whole process for me...” And speaking of the coach he said, “I wanted to make sure you understood: You made a mistake, dude.”

That relentless drive won six rings and made him the greatest who ever played.

But that same night, one reporter called that moment the “worst of all” in a speech full of settling old scores: dragging a high school teammate across the country just to relive the sting in front of a laughing crowd.

Jordan couldn't let go—even on the night the entire basketball world was standing to applaud him. That same inability to switch it off carried over into high-stakes gambling habits that sparked major controversies and public scrutiny.

Competitiveness on a basketball court can be thrilling, even beautiful.

Competitiveness that quietly seeps into every aspect of your life—like relationships, even ministry—becomes a weight that can hurt even your loved ones.

That brings us to another fiercely driven man sitting at the same table two thousand years ago: Simon Peter.

That very night, Jesus looked around the room and told the Twelve that every single one of them would fall away.

In Matthew's account, Peter immediately shot back:

"Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."
Matthew 26:33

A few minutes later, in Luke's account of the same conversation, after Jesus warned that Satan had demanded to sift them like wheat and that He had prayed especially for Peter, Peter doubled down:

"Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." Luke 22:33

Again, on that same night we still see the same overconfident heart—the same Peter who is absolutely certain he will out-perform, out-last, and out-love every other disciple in the room.

And Jesus did not smile and say, "That's just Peter being Peter."

He added the words that crushed every last ounce of bravado:

"I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know Me." (Luke 22:34)

Jesus loved Peter too much to leave that proud, prove-myself spirit untouched.

So He did two things:

1. He prayed that Peter's faith would survive the coming collapse.
2. He foretold the failure, yet promised to walk with Peter through it and out the other side—turning a self-confident, competitive fisherman into a self-denying shepherd who would one day gladly lay down his life for the flock, as Christ did for him.

That is the difference between a drive that consumes everything in its path and a drive that is refined in the furnace of God's love until it warms and lights the world.

Main idea: Jesus doesn't make disciples by shielding them from failure and suffering, but by praying them through it, prophesying it, and patiently forging them in it—until all their confidence is in Him alone.

1. Jesus prays for a faith that must be tested

Beginning in verse 31:

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you [the you there is plural, meaning—all of you] that he might sift you [again plural—all of you] like wheat..."

Satan has asked for the whole group, like he asked for Job. He wants to shake them violently, like wheat in a sieve separating the chaff—hoping to prove their faith is worthless and leave them disillusioned and without hope of recovery. But he underestimates the power of Jesus' intercession and restoring grace.

So Jesus singles Peter out in verse 32:

"...but I have prayed for you [singular—Peter] that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

In the Greek the shift from plural to singular is stark: Again, Satan asked to sift all of you (plural), but Jesus prays for you, Peter (singular), that your faith will survive.

Why Peter? Because if the leader's faith collapses, the faith of the others will be impacted as well. But if Peter's faith survives the sifting or is purified by it, he will be able to strengthen his brothers.

Now, notice what Jesus does NOT pray:

"Lord, keep Satan away from Peter" or "Father, make the next 24 hours easy."

No! He prays,

"Let his faith survive the sifting."

Why? Because a faith that has never been tested cannot be trusted.

Peter's real problem wasn't weak faith; it was misplaced faith—too much in Peter, too little in Jesus. Jesus knows the only way to fix that is to let Peter fall flat on his face so he stops trusting his own bravado and starts trusting the One who will never let him go.

When you feel like wheat being sifted—violently shaken so everything worthless falls away—remember: Jesus is praying for you right now, not always to spare you the furnace, but often to refine you in it.

Jesus didn't want His disciples to be under any illusions that following Him would be smooth sailing, which brings us to our next point:

2. Jesus prophesies a path that leads through suffering

After revealing to Peter that He would be praying for His faith because of the plot of the enemy, Peter responds like Peter:

"Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." Luke 22:33

And again, Jesus added the words that took the air out of his inflated ego:

“I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know Me.” (Luke 22:34)

You know, it never dawned on me until I was preparing this message just how rich the prophetic irony is here.

The rooster—the ancient, universal symbol of pride, the bird that struts and crows to announce its own greatness—becomes the very instrument God uses to shatter Peter’s cockiness.

Peter, who just declared he was stronger, braver, and more loyal than all the rest, is brought low by the proudest creature in the barnyard.

One ordinary rooster, doing what roosters do, becomes the voice of divine irony.

Its crow is not cruelty; it is severe mercy.

It is the sound of grace breaking the back of pride so that divine love rises up and becomes his stability and security.

Charles Spurgeon saw it:

“The [Rooster] is the herald of the dawn, but in Peter’s case it was the herald of his shame... God made the proud bird crow to humble a proud apostle.”

John Piper adds:

“Isn’t it perfect that the symbol of human arrogance is the very creature God used to crush Peter’s arrogance?”

The same God who turned proud Nebuchadnezzar into a grazing animal for seven years used a proud rooster to turn the cockiest apostle into a weeping, broken man—and then into a humble shepherd who would sacrificially care for the flock of God.

O, that rooster is still crowing today—every time we start strutting, every time we think we're the exception, every time we boast "Even if everyone else falls away, I never will."

And when it crows in our own lives, may we hear it the way Peter finally did:

not as condemnation,
but as the severe mercy of a Savior who loves us too much to leave us full of ourselves.

Now that's the path Jesus is preparing his disciples for in the very next verses:

"When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "Nothing." He said to them, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.' For what is written about me has its fulfillment."
Luke 22:35-37

Now, Jesus is not starting an armed rebellion.
He's saying the season has changed: from this moment on, following Me will mean living as one counted among criminals, embracing a cross shaped life, and facing hardship and rejection for My name.

But the disciples still don't get it.
Verse 38:

"Look, Lord, here are two swords."

They heard "buy a sword" and thought Jesus was finally launching the revolution they'd always wanted—the violent overthrow of Rome, to restore Israel's glory by force. But the opposite was true. He would soon be numbered with the transgressors in fulfillment of prophecy—the one who knew no sin would be made sin for us so that we could become the righteousness of God in Him.

But again their response was: “Look, Lord, here are two swords.”

Two swords would be laughably inadequate for that revolution, yet in their minds they’re already counting themselves ready for battle. But Jesus is not recruiting revolutionaries.

He’s preparing them for rejection, suffering, and a cross.

So when they proudly produce their two little swords, Jesus—knowing their hearts are still wired for conquest instead of Calvary—gently lets it go with two words:

“It is enough.”

He’s not agreeing that two swords will do the job. He’s lovingly ending a conversation they’re not ready to have, because the real lesson won’t be taught with words that night—it will be forged in the fires of betrayal, denial, and resurrection.

And that brings us to our final point:

3. Jesus patiently turns self-confident fishermen into self-denying warriors (the long game)

That single, gentle “It is enough” is the starting gun for the slow, beautiful work that will be completed on a quiet Galilean shore in John 21—where Jesus will take Peters’

sword-swinging,
thrice-denying,
competitive heart

and turn it, with three probing questions, into the heart of a humble shepherd the church will one day lean on.

Fast-forward just a week or two from that tense upper-room night. The disciples have made their way north to Galilee, exactly where Jesus told them He would meet them.

John 21 tells us that Peter says, 'I'm going fishing,' and six of the other disciples decide to go with him.

They fish all night and catch nothing. But at dawn, a figure on the shore calls out, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

When they answer no, He tells them to cast the net on the right side of the boat. Suddenly the net is bursting with fish—and John realizes, "It is the Lord!"

Moments later they discover Jesus already has a charcoal fire going. He's grilling fish and bread, and He invites them, "Come and have breakfast."

So picture the scene: the sun is barely up, mist is rising off the water, and seven tired, astonished disciples are sitting around that charcoal fire, eating grilled fish straight from the hands of the risen Jesus.

Peter is there, but he is not the same man who once strutted through Jerusalem with a sword. Three nights before the crucifixion he warmed his hands at another charcoal fire—in the courtyard of the high priest—and there he swore with curses that he never knew the Man on trial inside. Every time he smells burning coals now, the echo of that lie still rings in his ears.

He has seen the risen Jesus twice already, but shame keeps him from meeting His Savior's eyes for long. He is a failure who has been forgiven, but he does not yet know how to live inside that forgiveness.

For years Peter measured himself against the others. He boasted he would never fall away even if everyone else did. He stepped out on the water when the others stayed in the boat. He swore he would die before denying his Lord.

Yet after they finish eating, Jesus turns to him—not with accusation, but with deliberate, restoring love.

"Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?"

The question cuts like a surgeon's scalpel.

Let me suggest to you that "More than these" is not about boats or nets. It's about the six other disciples sitting within earshot. Jesus is gently exposing the competitive root that helped fuel Peter's collapse.

Peter's answer, is quieter now, stripped of bravado:

"Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." And Jesus responds, "Feed My lambs."

Jesus asked a second time: "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" But notice this second time, the additional words "more than these" are gone. Only the raw question remains. And Peter responds again:

"Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." Jesus says, "Tend My sheep."

Then a third time—one for every denial:

"Simon, son of John, do you love Me?"

Peter is grieved, but he finally gets it. He says,

"Lord, You know everything; You know that I love You."

O how our lives would be so much better off, and spared of much trouble if we would really believe that Jesus knows better than we do.

As Tim Keller says, "The third time Jesus asks, Peter finally stops trying to prove anything and just throws himself on the mercy of the One who knows him better than he knows himself. That's the moment Peter is healed."

Jesus then gives His final commission:

“Feed My sheep” and a few moments later, “Follow Me.”

These questions from Jesus to Peter were gentle but unrelenting—like waves wearing away a rocky shore.

Again, the questions came three times, with three commissions for a threefold restoration. And again, in response to Jesus' question, Peter doesn't say,

“You know I love You more than these other disciples, including John,”

or,

“I know I messed up, but I'm going to prove to You that I love You more than the rest.” He simply says,

“Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”

That's the breakfast every comparing heart still needs. Peter didn't need to love Jesus more than the others; he just needed to love Jesus.

Retired pastor Lee Eclov, reflecting on this very breakfast, put it this way:

“Comparisons plague pastors ... When we stand knee-deep in the sludge of greater-than, more-committed-than, and more-strategic-than, Jesus' questions will call us out, ‘Yes, but do you love me more than these?’ We blush, clear our throat, and stammer, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ If we have any sense at all—any recollection of our failures—we do not reply, ‘You know I love you more than they do.’ Jesus asked His question ‘Do you love me?’ three times, but only added ‘more than these’ the first time. I suspect that's all it took for him to surgically excise Peter's cancerous self-confidence once and for all ... [That same gentle surgery is what Jesus still performs on every comparing heart that belongs to Him—until we are finally free to

love Him and find our all in Him.] Then we can turn back to our shepherding work free of comparisons.”

Again, that single truth is the breakfast every comparing heart still needs.

But then Peter glances over his shoulder and sees John following at a distance. And the old reflex flares up one more time. John 21:21 records,

“Lord, what about this man?” Jesus’ answer is tender, firm, and final:

“If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You—follow Me.”

Eight words of absolute liberation:

“What is that to you? You—follow Me.”

Brothers and sisters, comparison dies at the table of grace. There is no leaderboard at this breakfast. John is not praised for staying at the cross. Thomas is not scolded again for doubting. They are simply fed by nail-scarred hands.

Jesus takes the same competitive spirit that made Peter swing a sword and deny his Lord, and He lovingly removes it—one gentle, public question at a time—until Peter’s only boast is Jesus.

Conclusion

Beloved, Jesus is still kindling charcoal fires of grace and asking the only question that heals:

“Do you love Me?”

When we finally answer, humbled and empty-handed,

“Lord, You know everything—You know I love You,” He hands us the same commission He handed Peter:

“Feed My lambs ... Follow Me.”

We no longer have to live for the approval of man; we live because we have the approval of the One who matters most.

Paul Tripp names the freedom Peter tasted that morning:

“If you have the applause of the One who declared, ‘It is finished,’ you no longer need to live for the applause of anyone else.”

Where are you today? It’s been said: you’re either in a fire, coming out of a fire, or heading into one.

Jesus isn’t just offering the grace of **relief** from the fire—He’s offering the grace of **resilience** through it.

His body was broken and His blood poured out for us—not just to **rescue** us from the coming fire, but to **refine** us through the fires of this life so we can know the sufficiency of His grace and make Him known.

Will you let Him finish the forging?

Will you let Him have the swagger, the need to measure yourself against others, your two-sword solutions?

Will you trust that His long, loving way is the only way that turns fishermen into warriors who are still standing when the rooster crows?

He’s not finished with you.

He’s just getting started.

And that, beloved, is more than enough.