

Well, good morning; how are we? Good, good! I want to give a quick shout-out to my people joining us in our online community! I'm so glad you are a part of the Foothills Family and that you're with us in worship and studying God's Word from wherever and whenever you're at. Well, if I haven't been able to meet you, my name is Doug; I'm one of the Pastors here, and I would love to connect with you on the patio after we worship together. So, be sure to come and say hi.

We're continuing our way through the Gospel of Mark. So if you've got your Bibles, which I hope you do, if you could open up with me to Mark, chapter 14, that's where we'll be.

You know, when I consider what some of the qualities are that have shaped our culture, and that for decades has been a value of America, one of the first that comes to mind is this idea of individualism. This concept is deeply ingrained in American culture.

Individualism emphasizes self-sufficiency. It tends to disregard or minimize the importance of community. And to be quite honest with you, those of us who tend to have a more traditionalist and conservative thought process, tend to celebrate individualism a bit more.

I mean, consider the "American Dream." The idea of the American dream is deeply rooted in the belief that individuals can rise to success based on their own merit and their own efforts, regardless of their background or

circumstances. This ideal emphasizes the values of hard work, determination, and personal responsibility in achieving success. Now, that doesn't sound so bad!

I mean, something that we celebrate with great joy is American Independence! But, not just from the monarchy, but independence is highly prized in American culture. Just ask any 15 and a half year old who's in drivers ed class right now. We celebrate financial independence and personal autonomy. The ability to support oneself financially, make one's own decisions, and chart one's own path in life are seen as markers of maturity and success in our culture. And, if you're struggling with that, don't worry. Because American culture is saturated with self-help literature, motivational speakers, and personal development workshops that encourage individuals to take control of their lives, set goals, and overcome obstacles through self-improvement efforts.

In a culture that often celebrates self-sufficiency and independence, it's easy to fall into the trap of relying solely on our own abilities, wisdom, and resources. We live in an era where the mantra of "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" echoes loudly, and the idea of depending on anyone but ourselves can seem counterintuitive or even weak. Yet, as we dig into the Scriptures, we uncover a profound truth: our strength is found not in ourselves, in our individualism, it is not found in self-reliance, but in our humble dependence on God.

It tends to be hard for us to remember that we are a "new creation." That as believers in Jesus, as those who have been adopted, grafted in, or as we read in Philippians 3, we are now citizens of Heaven. We throw off and leave behind the ways of the broken, fallen, and depraved world and we put on the culture, the mind, of Christ.

And in our opening passage we see that this is not a unique struggle that you and I deal with in modernity, but that it is something that was challenging for those who walked with Jesus, ate with Jesus, who were His closest disciples.

If you'll join me in verse 26 we read, **26** And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. **27** And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' **28** But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." **29** Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." **30** And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." **31** But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same (Mark 14:26-31, ESV).

One thing that I love about Peter is his passion. There's no question about Peter being sold out for the cause. Peter declares, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." Yet, Jesus assures him that he surely would and that he will go so far as to deny knowing Jesus three times. And you can hear the offense in Peter's voice as he explodes in protest! He says, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you."

For Peter this is abhorrent, it is completely detestable to think that he would ever deny Jesus. I mean, Peter has witnessed what Jesus has done, he's seen the blind given sight, the lame walk, the dead come to life, Peter was there when Elijah and Moses showed up and Jesus transfigured! Remember that, he was speechless, he didn't know what to do, but there was no question that Peter understood that Jesus was the Messiah. He was the first to declare it.

So for Peter, it's ridiculous to think that he would ever deny Jesus. Peter's strong reaction even reveals that he's offended at the thought, even hurt by the idea. "Of all people Jesus, you think I would do that?" "Maybe Matthew, I mean he was a tax-collector. Or for sure Thomas. But me? I'm Peter, I'm as solid as a rock."

Peter missed it. He missed that Jesus had just quoted Zechariah. Jesus was quoting Zechariah 13:7 in which there will be an opening of a fountain for the cleansing of sin on behalf of the house of David and Jerusalem. And in that process as the Shepherd is struck down the sheep would be scattered as an integral piece of the refining process, which eventually lead to the creation of a new people of God.

But Peter misses it. He's so focused on himself. He's so offended that he misses what Jesus is saying. He missed verse 28 where Jesus, says, you will scatter, but, **28** But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."

Jesus is promising reunion. Jesus is saying, though your going to scatter, it is in Galilee after I'm resurrected you will be restored to Me.

But, for Peter, he knows himself. He knows his strength. He's been one of the key disciples and he's been leading the others. "Jesus, you can rely on me!" That's what Peter's saying. But friends, when we're blinded by misplaced trust, we fail to rely on God. And that's what happened to Peter.

Peter was confident in his own ability, his own character, his own experiences that he didn't hear Jesus. He didn't grasp what Jesus was trying to teach him.

See, there's a delicate balance between self-reliance and God-reliance. We have to be so careful to avoid the pitfalls of excessive confidence in our own abilities so that we can know the boundless blessings that come from surrendering to God's infinite power and wisdom.

Jesus goes on to show Peter what this looks like in the next section. Let's look at this, verse 32, 32 And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples,

"Sit here while I pray." ³³And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. ³⁴And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." ³⁵And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." ³⁷And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? ³⁸Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ³⁹And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. ⁴¹And he came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴²Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

This is rough.

The disciples had been so confident. They expressed their loyalty and support for Jesus, just shortly before being like, "we're with you, ain't none of us gonna let you down." And here they are falling asleep on Jesus when he's going through agony, suffering at the thought of what was to come, Jesus goes to his closest followers for companionship with whom he brought with him, yet, here they are asleep.

So, Jesus addresses Peter. "Are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?" Now, what I find really interesting here is that He actually called him, "Simon." "Simon, are you asleep?" Why would Jesus revert to calling him his old name?

We actually see this in the Old Testament as well. A new name is tied to the person's identity. You were this, but now you will be this. For example, Jacob in the Old Testament received the new name, Israel. Jacob means "supplanter" or "trickster," and so God changed his name to Israel, or "having power with God." Likewise, the name Simon meant, "he has heard." But with Peter's transformation Jesus gave him a new name, Peter, or rock.

It seems that sometimes when an old name is used, it is pointing back to them acting like their old self. For instance, Peter not being able to stay awake is not in alignment with who Jesus has called him to be as the rock.

Ironically, as Jesus had said that Peter would deny him three times, here Jesus finds him asleep three times. And Jesus tries to use it as a teaching moment for Peter explaining, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Jesus is highlighting their humanity. They couldn't keep their eyes open. They couldn't stay strong. Even though their hearts desire was to

be there for Jesus, to support Jesus, to live for Jesus. But, the reality is that the weakness of the flesh hinders our hearts desire.

And we need to understand this. We need to be honest with ourselves about this. We need to learn from the experience of Peter and the others here. We may have a desire to do what is right in the eyes of God, we may have a desire to live for Jesus, but as long as we are trying to do it on our own strength, we will never succeed. Jesus describes it this way, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5)."

To follow Jesus, friends, we must first surrender to Jesus. We must lay down our lives. Jesus made this quite clear when He said, "If anyone would follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. **24** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it (Luke 9:23-24)." Jesus is saying, surrender your life to Me. Follow Me.

We must come to the realization of our weakness. Our inability to do what only He can do. We must learn to rely on Jesus and not on our own ideas, our own giftings, our own experiences and to do this we must throw off the individualism and see that God has designed us to work in community as the Church showed us in Acts. We must live our lives not individually, on our strength, but in communion with Jesus, in communion with the Triune God.

In the gospel of Luke, chapter 18 Jesus tells the story of two men. One a devout religious man, a Pharisee. This guy never missed church. He served at all the men's bbqs, in the student ministry, taught a class on Sunday mornings, and gave a bunch of money to the ministry. The other

man was an embarrassment to society. He was an outcast, hated by his own people for betraying them. He was the worst of sinners, he worked for the IRS. He was a tax-collector. Jesus tells the story like this, "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' **13** But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

You could say that the religious leaders heart was right. He tried to live righteously, perfectly. But in doing so was actually living out of the weakness of His flesh. It was the man who surrendered. The one who recognized his weakness and chose to rely solely on God who went home justified.

Friends, that's where you and I need to be. On our knees. Surrendered. Some of you are struggling as parents. Some of you are struggling through your marriage, in your jobs, and other relationships, or even some areas of sin that you think you can get control of on your own and you have all these ideas about how to make things right, how to get through, how to fix it, but all Jesus wants you to do is fall on your knees and surrender before Him and allow Him to take control. Though your hearts desire is good, your flesh is weak.

Despite Peter's confident assertion that he would never fall away, men arrive and arrest Jesus. He's betrayed by Judas for a little bit of money and Jesus is taken and stands before the Chief Priest and the entire council where they struggle to find reasons to punish him. Until they ask him in verse 61, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" **62** And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

At this they cry out for his death ⁶⁵and some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him."

And that's where we pick it up in verse 66, ⁶⁶"And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, **67** and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." **68** But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. **69** And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." **70** But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." **71** But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." **72** And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept."

Peter's denial highlights the reality of human weakness and imperfection. Despite his earlier declaration of loyalty to Jesus, Peter fails to stand by Him when it matters most. This serves as a reminder to us all that even the most devout followers of Jesus are susceptible to sin and failure.

It is in his weakness that Peter denies Jesus. Peter acted out of fear. Fear of man, fear of those in power, fear of what could happen to him. This demonstrates the danger of succumbing to fear and the temptation to deny our faith when we are faced with difficult situations. It reminds us that fear can lead us to compromise our beliefs and values. And you and I can sit here all day and say, "I would never deny Jesus," but few, if any of us have been in the place where Peter is.

Peter highlights for you and I the frailty of human nature and the need for dependence on God's strength rather than relying solely on our own abilities. Friends, we need to humbly acknowledge our weaknesses and rely on God's grace and power to sustain us in our faith journey.

I'd like to close with looking at the end of verse 72, "And he broke down and wept." Peter broke down and wept. Friends, genuine repentance takes humility and dependence.

Peter experiences deep remorse and weeps bitterly. This shows the importance of genuine repentance when we recognize our failures and shortcomings. I don't know that we spend enough time repenting. I don't know that we spend enough time on our knees weeping because of our failures as husbands and wives, parents, and co-workers, friends, and leaders.

In fact, I'd argue we spend far more time making excuses for ourselves and others or chalking it up to, "well, we're only human" rather than falling on our knees and crying out, "my God, my God, have mercy on me!"

See that takes humility. And the answer to the change, the answer to the repentance is not, "I'm going to try harder, read another self-help book," but it is complete and utter reliance on the Triune God.

Genuine repentance takes humility and dependence.

Despite Peter's denial, despite my short-comings, your short-comings, Jesus remains faithful. God's love and grace are greater than our mistakes and He is always ready to forgive and restore us when we turn back to Him. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1-6)."

"2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. **3** For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, **4** in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. **5** For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. **6** For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."

As we journey through this world may our hearts be open to the transformative power of relying on God in every aspect of our lives, seeking to deepen our trust in the One who holds all things together and invites us to cast all our cares on Him.

May we be a people who cry out in confession, "Have mercy on me, a sinner!" A people who confesses our desperate need for Jesus' sacrifice.

Who confess our desperate need for His transformative power in our lives. Who desperately needed that rock rolled away!