

# Struggling Faith

## Teaching Tips

March 20, 2016

## Bible Study Guide 3

### Words You Should Know

**A. Offend** ([Mark 14:27](#)) *skandalizo* (Gk.)—To cause to stumble or sin; to be made to stumble



**B. Deny** (vv. 30, 31, 72) *aparneomai* (Gk.)— To remove oneself from or disown an individual, or refuse to admit or acknowledge the existence of.

### Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Overconfidence and Failure. People often overestimate their ability to remain loyal to and support a cause. What happens when they discover they cannot do something they truly believed they could? Peter was convinced of his faith, but he grieved mightily when he understood that his failure to stand up publicly as a follower of Jesus Christ was evidence of the weakness of his faith.

- A. Pray for clarity and application, for you and the students.
- B. Study the companion lesson thoroughly, in advance.

### O—Open the Lesson

- A. Introduce today's lesson title and Aim for Change.
- B. Have students read the Keep in Mind verse and In Focus story.

### P—Present the Scriptures

- A. Give students a few minutes to silently read The People, Places, and Times and Background.
- B. Have students read the Focal Verses (aloud or silently), encouraging them to keep in mind the information presented in The People, Places, and Times and Background.
- C. Use the In Depth content and Search the Scriptures to facilitate discussion on the Focal Verses.

### E—Explore the Meaning

- A. Have the class answer the questions in Discuss the Meaning.
- B. Read Lesson in Our Society.

### N—Next Steps for Application

- A. Briefly review the lesson, highlighting the Keep in Mind verse.
- B. Read Make It Happen and re-read the Aim for Change aloud.
- C. Pray with students that they will respond faithfully when faced with temptation in the future.

## Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Struggling Faith

Song: “Higher Ground”

Devotional Reading: [Jeremiah 3:12–18](#)



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## Powerful Faith

**Bible Background** • [MARK 14:26–31, 66–72](#)



**Printed Text** • [MARK 14:26–31, 66–72](#) | **Devotional Reading** • [JEREMIAH 3:12–18](#)



## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: REMEMBER all that happened when Peter denied Jesus as He had foretold; EXPLORE feelings experienced when one fails to meet the expectations of others; and PRACTICE spiritual disciplines to build a stronger relationship with God.



## In Focus



It was a heated argument. A lot of words were said, many of them regrettable. Abu still could not believe that his parents had completely disowned him. Yes, he loved Jesus, but he also loved his parents. He told them that. But, following Jesus meant rejecting their faith, which was equivalent to rejecting them in their eyes. Nothing he said could persuade them otherwise. They were his parents. His mother, she birthed him, nursed and nurtured him. His father raised him and proudly taught him his craft. How could they forsake him because he found the truth?

Now, his fiancée Sarai was beginning to question his love for her. She wasn't committed to her parents' faith—she questioned it, actually—but the fear of facing similar rejection kept her pretending. She insisted that if Abu loved her, he would pretend along with her—publicly denounce his newfound faith as a lapse in judgment—but still privately worship Jesus. Abu was confused and hurt. After losing his parents, he didn't want to lose Sarai too. Maybe what she recommended would work. Abu seriously contemplated what it would mean to compromise his faith in Jesus. This decision was not easy.

*Occasionally temptations arise to cause us to contemplate compromising our faith. How has God equipped us to overcome temptations to compromise our faith?*

## Keep in Mind

“And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou

shalt deny me thrice” (Mark 14:30).



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## Focal Verses

KJV

**Mark 14:26** And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.



**27** And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.

**28** But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.

**29** But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.

**30** And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

**31** But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.

**66** And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest:

**67** And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.

**68** But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.

**69** And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them.

**70** And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaeen, and thy speech agreeth thereto.

**71** But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.

**72** And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.

NLT

**Mark 14:26** Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.



**27** On the way, Jesus told them, “All of you will desert me. For the Scriptures say, ‘God will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’”

**28** But after I am raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there.”

**29** Peter said to him, “Even if everyone else deserts you, I never will.”

**30** Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you even know me.”

**31** “No!” Peter declared emphatically. “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!” And all the others vowed the same.

**66** Meanwhile, Peter was in the courtyard below. One of the servant girls who worked for the high priest came by

**67** and noticed Peter warming himself at the fire. She looked at him closely and said, “You were one of those with Jesus of Nazareth.”

**68** But Peter denied it. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said, and he went out into the entryway. Just then, a rooster crowed.

**69** When the servant girl saw him standing there, she began telling the others, “This man is definitely one of them!”

**70** But Peter denied it again. A little later some of the other bystanders confronted Peter and said, “You must be one of them, because you are a Galilean.”

**71** Peter swore, “A curse on me if I’m lying—I don’t know this man you’re talking about!”

**72** And immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Suddenly, Jesus’ words flashed through Peter’s mind: “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you even know me.” And he broke down and wept.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Last Supper.** The Passover feast was instituted during the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt ([Exodus 12](#)). One ritual of the feast required the sacrifice of a lamb. During the last of the ten plagues, the Lord set out to kill all of the firstborn males in Egypt. The lamb’s blood was to be placed over the doorposts of the Israelites’ homes as a sign that He would “pass over” them. In remembrance of their deliverance from death and slavery, they were to celebrate the Passover annually. The last supper Christ shared with His disciples before becoming the sacrificial Lamb for the sins of the world was this Passover feast. It was during this feast that He revealed His betrayal, and betrayed (14:17–20), and instituted the Lord’s Supper (communion) (14:22–25).

**Christ’s Arrest.** The circumstances surrounding Christ’s arrest were filled with heartbreak and illegalities. He predicts the disciples’ desertion. When He tasks several of them with watching while He prays in the garden of Gethsemane before His arrest, they fall asleep three times. In Gethsemane, His favorite place to meet with His disciples, He is betrayed with a kiss, a symbol of affection and love. He was “tried” by several members of the Sanhedrin, which was made up of 71 men—chief priests, elders, and teachers of the Law—whose roles were to uphold justice. Yet, in Christ’s arrest, they used one of His own to betray Him (14:10–11), and came with a detachment of armed troops, perhaps as many as 600 ([John 18:3](#)). They held an illegal trial with false witnesses, in the middle of the night (maybe as late as 3 a.m.), in an unusual location: the home of Caiaphas, the high priest ([Matthew 26:57](#)).

## Background

While not explicitly stated in the book, Mark is thought to have written this book for Gentile believers, especially Roman Christians facing horrendous persecution. Throughout the book, Mark chooses not to focus on Jesus’ genealogy or Jewish heritage, but His triumphs and tragedies, and His roles as Savior-King and Servant. He vividly shares stories of Christ’s miracles, but also His struggles—the hostility of the Jewish leaders, and in this case, the desertion and denial of those closest to Him. Mark wrote with Peter’s notes and eyewitness accounts, and likely under his supervision.

Leading up to the events in these passages, Jesus had announced His death to His disciples several times (8:31, 9:31, 10:33), and the hour had come. During this final warning about His impending death, and after instituting the Lord’s Supper, the disciples sang a hymn. Typically [Psalms 113–118](#) were sung during the Passover. [Psalm 118:22](#)—“The stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone”—was used by Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost referring to Jesus’ betrayal.

## At-A-Glance

### 1. Christ Predicts Peter's Denial ( [Mark 14:26–31](#) )

### 2. Peter's First Denials—The Servant Girl (vv. 66–69)

### 3. Peter's Final Denial (vv. 70–72)

## In Depth

### 1. Christ Predicts Peter's Denial ( [Mark 14:26–31](#) )

Likely in a very somber mood, Christ and the disciples began the walk to the Mount of Olives, which would have taken at least fifteen minutes. He has reminded them of His impending death and sent His betrayer on his way, but there is more pain to come. Quoting [Zechariah 13:7](#), Jesus predicted that when He (the Shepherd) is struck, they (the sheep) would desert him. After three years of living and traveling together, being taught by Him, seeing Him perform miracles and serve others, and coming to a clearer understanding of who He is, they would still lose courage and forsake Him. However, He does not leave them hopeless, reminding them that He will be resurrected and go before them to Galilee. (The angel repeats this to Mary Magdalene and Salome in 16:7.) With the disappointment of Judas' betrayal looming, Peter found this desertion unfathomable, and confidently proclaims that even if all the others abandoned Christ, he would not.

Christ solemnly affirmed that Peter's failure would be even greater than desertion: he would refuse to admit or acknowledge that Christ even existed, three times, before the rooster crows twice. Peter still refused to accept this possibility, even promising he would die before denying Him.

### 2. Peter's First Denials—The Servant Girl (vv. 66–69)

In between Christ's prediction of denial and this passage is His prayer in the garden, where three times Peter failed to remain alert and awake. Christ's words to him in the garden were "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (14:38, NKJV). This could have served as a warning for what was to come.

After Christ's arrest, the other disciples scattered, but Peter followed at a distance, lingering in the high priest's courtyard by the fire, presumably to see what would happen to Jesus (14:53–54). A servant girl, probably a doorkeeper, saw and recognized him: "You also were with Jesus of Nazareth." He denies, claiming not to understand, a common problem among the disciples, especially in Mark ([Mark 4:13](#); [6:52](#); [8:17,21](#); [9:32](#)). He then moved to a different location, a covered porch, away from light, where he would not be so easily recognized. That is when the rooster crowed the first time. The servant found him again, and pointed him out to those around them. Again, He denied knowing Jesus.

### 3. Peter's Final Denial (vv. 70–72)

About an hour after the first two denials, more bystanders heard him speaking. Judean accents differed from Galilean accents. Noticing his Aramaic dialect was Galilean (and they were in Jerusalem, in Judea), they assumed he must have been a follower of Jesus, from Galilee. This final denial was more severe than the first. First, he refused to use Jesus' name (calling him "this man"). Then, he swore, not using profanity, but placing himself under God's curse if he was lying to them, which he was. Thus came his third denial in less than two hours, punctuated by the rooster crowing a second time. [Luke 22:61–62](#) says that Jesus turned to look at Peter, and Peter, remembering Christ's prophecy, wept. It is noted that Mark is the only one to record the rooster would crow twice. As Peter was Mark's informant, Peter would have vividly remembered this detail as he shared the events with Mark.

## Search the Scriptures

1. What predictions did Christ make ( [Mark 14:27, 30](#))?



2. How were those predictions fulfilled (vv. 71–72)?



## Discuss the Meaning

These passages reveal how anyone can struggle with their faith. We see twelve men who walked with Jesus daily for three years make horrible decisions when faced with opportunity, persecution, and suffering. They abandoned not only their Lord and Teacher, but a beloved friend. Peter's failure is not only in his desertion, but in his overconfidence, and therefore not safeguarding his faith through prayer. What warning does this provide for us? How can we guard against "deserting" Christ in our lives?

## Lesson in Our Society

In America, we do not face with the same persecution as the disciples or original readers of Mark's Gospel. However, we are often tempted to compromise or abandon what we know to be true. Do we take advantage of that unethical but technically legal financial loophole because we need the money? Do we pursue that relationship—personal or professional—that will cause us to deny Christ in many ways? Do we tell people that we are followers of Christ? Or, do we avoid "spiritual" conversations because we do not want to seem eccentric, "holier than thou," or be associated with "those Christians"? God is calling us to be faithful to Him in all aspects of our lives.

## Make It Happen

The redemptive part of Peter's story is that he was remorseful, repentant, and ultimately restored. Mark records the angel telling the women at the tomb, "Give this message to his disciples, including Peter," indicating Christ's forgiveness (from 16:7). Peter goes on to become a leader in the early church, courageously and faithfully serving Christ for the rest of his life. So, if you have found that you have denied Christ or abandoned your faith in some areas, know that there is redemption. Pray that God will reveal to you areas of compromise. Confess and repent. Forgive others and ask for forgiveness. Pray for ways to rectify the situations, if possible. Then pray for faith and courage to make different choices when faced with similar circumstances in the future.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do.

## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned.

## More Light on the Text

[Mark 14:26–31, 66–72](#)

**26 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.**




After the Passover meal, in Jewish tradition, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn. They would have sung [Psalms 113–118](#). The Greek word for sing is *hymneo* (**hoom-NEH-oh**), which implies a song of praise to God. After this, Jesus and His disciples went to the Mount of Olives for further discussion and prayers, as they often did. The Mount of Olives was outside the walls of Jerusalem, but from there they could look down and see the temple. The Garden of Gethsemane was on the Mount of Olives. Jesus often took His disciples to this quiet and beautiful place.



**27 And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite**

**the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.**

Jesus knew that He was soon going to be hung on the Cross—nails hammered in by the Romans at the instigation of His own people. But perhaps one of the most hurtful things was that His own disciples would desert Him. The word “offended” in Greek is *skandalizo* (**skan-dah-LEED-zoh**) and it means to cause to stumble or in this case to be made to stumble. The English word “scandalize” comes from this same Greek root, and we could say that when Jesus was arrested, His disciples were so scandalized by what had happened to their Master that they ran away in great fear. If this was happening to Him, what would happen to them next? Jesus quoted [Zechariah 13:7](#), which predicted that when the Good Shepherd was struck, all of His sheep would be scattered. The sheep were the disciples—the apostles and other followers as well. 

**28 But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.**

After Jesus had quoted Zechariah’s prediction that the sheep would be scattered, He had some words of comfort that seemed to be completely overlooked by the disciples. Jesus said that He would be raised up and once more gather His sheep together and lead them. Peter heard the words that the sheep would fall away, but he did not hear Jesus say that He would rise again. When we look from our view, after it was all over, the disciples were only without their Lord for three short days, but these were the three most amazing days in history.

**29 But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I. 30 And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.**


Peter declared that he would not deny stumble, even if all the others did. But Jesus knew Peter’s heart. Peter was too sure of himself. He forgot that it’s too easy to slip up in life. Despite this overconfidence, at least Peter had his heart in the right place, and Jesus knew that. Peter could not believe that he would deny the Lord, but Jesus told him that that very night he would deny Him—three times!

Jesus said “verily” or “I tell you the truth” to emphasize the solemnity of His words. This is the same word that we say when we agree with what the preacher says: amen (Gk. *amen*, **ah-MAIN**), a word that originated in Hebrew.

**31 But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.**

“More vehemently” is an adverbial phrase and means Peter kept on speaking. Vehemently in Greek is *perissos* (**peh-rees-SOS**), which means excessively. Peter insisted that even if it meant his death, he would not deny Jesus; then all the other disciples said the same—they would not deny their Lord. Assuming that our spiritual strength lies in ourselves, rather than in our Lord, is very dangerous. An even greater danger is bragging about our spiritual strength—what we would always do or never do. We can avoid this by humbly asking God for His help in everything we do.

**66 And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: 67 And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. 68 But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.**

In [John 18:15–16](#), we read that the Apostle John, known to the high priestly family, interceded with the maid to bring Peter into the lower portion of the palace. So as Peter warmed his hands by the fire, the maid recognized him as the same one she had let in earlier. Peter, who had been so brave, suddenly lost his nerve and denied Jesus, knowing he was under the threat of death if he was identified as one of His followers. 

**69 And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. 70 And he denied it again. And then Peter denied Jesus again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely**

**thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaeen, and thy speech agreeth thereto. 71 But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.**

Evidently Peter entered without trying to hide himself, and the maid (doorkeeper) recognized him as one who was with Jesus. Not only was he recognized by sight as a disciple, but his dialect gave him away. Those who came from the region of Galilee, as all the disciples but Judas did, had a distinctive dialect. When he opened his mouth to speak, people in Jerusalem could immediately recognize him as a Galilean, and they knew that a famous Galilean (Jesus) was being tried at that unusually early hour.

With his third denial, Peter cursed. The Greek for curse is *anathematizo* (**ah-nah-theh-mah-TEED-zoh**), which means to declare cursed, or to put under a curse. When we read that Peter cursed, we think of taking the Lord's name in vain, but that is not what he did. Jews were very careful not to take the name of God in vain, because this prohibition was one of the Ten Commandments ([Exodus 20:7](#)). Instead, to verify that they were speaking the truth, they would pronounce an oath upon themselves. This would be similar to saying, "If I am not telling the truth, may lightning strike me dead." Jesus still forbade this, saying that we should let our yes be yes and our no be no ([Matthew 5:37](#)).

Once again Peter is confronted with potential recognition, and this time he responds with more vehemence, cursing and swearing that he does not know Jesus or His disciples. Peter's adamant promise of unending devotion to Jesus is now contrasted with unending denial of Him, serving as a caution that no matter how devoted we are to God, we always have the potential to abandon Him.

**72 And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.**

As the cock crowed the second time, conviction pierces Peter. The Scripture says that he called to mind Jesus' words to him. These words seal his contrition. The word for call to mind is not just to remember, but to weigh well or consider. Once he thinks on Jesus' words, he begins to weep. Peter is now ashamed of his denial. He realizes his self-confidence has now turned to weakness. His boldness has now turned to fear. Now he sits with the realization that He is not the ideal disciple and is left with the truth of his sinfulness.

## Say It Correctly

Gethsemane. geth-**SEM**-a-nee.

Galilean. ga-lih-**LEE**-en.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

Uniting Faith  
([Jeremiah 3:12–18](#))

### TUESDAY

Enlightening Faith  
([Isaiah 2:1–6](#))

### WEDNESDAY

Suffering Faith



(1 Peter 4:10–19)



## THURSDAY

Restored Faith  
(Psalm 85:4–13)



## FRIDAY

Overcoming Faith  
(Romans 12:14–21)



## SATURDAY

Marks of Faith  
(Galatians 5:22–26)



## SUNDAY

Struggling Faith  
(Mark 14:26–31, 66–72)

