



How to Prevent Spiritual Collapse

Mark 14, Luke 22

Objectives

- To identify the steps leading to Peter's spiritual collapse.
- To counteract collapse by taking positive steps to maintain a strong faith.

Overview

"How could I be so stupid?"

That was the question I asked myself over and over again. I was a good, Christian college kid who was on the brink of facing the most embarrassing situation of my life. Or, more simply put: I was busted.

Not for drugs or drinking or some other crime, but for making out with my girlfriend. Well...not just making out, but really making out. And not just really making out, but really making out in the office of the president of my school.

You know how in soccer the ball has to be all the over the line to be out of bounds? Well, somehow I had begun to view physical games with my girlfriend the same way. We weren't all the way over—and I was confident we would never be—but boy did we love to play along the sidelines.

And this evening, we were on the sidelines of a strange new field, making out in the president's outer office. We hadn't planned it. We were just walking by one evening and for some reason I tried the doorknob. It opened! We couldn't believe it! On a Christian college campus, this was a couple's dream come true. We could jump in that office lock the door behind us, and hang out undisturbed all evening long. *So we did!*

Well...we were slightly disturbed when, right in the middle of a passionate embrace, the door popped open, the light went on, and a campus security guard stood before us.

Laying on that couch together had been so romantic. But suddenly we felt utterly stupid as we scrambled off as fast as we could. We were disheveled and disoriented as we squinted in the bright light; but at least we had our clothes on. The guard took our names, threatened expulsion, and told us to wait in our rooms for a phone call from the dean. *How could I have been so stupid!*

My decline into compromise had been slow but steady. Someone once said that a Christian's spiritual collapse is never a blowout; it's always a slow leak. And that's exactly what mine was. We had begun lingering over goodnight kisses, but soon we were seeking extended periods of privacy. Studying together had quickly given way to taking lots of "study breaks"...breaks that lasted longer than the studying. Just days earlier my roommate saw me slipping and called me on it, but I blew him off with hollow reassurances of my moral strength.

But now I saw that I had walked right into the enemy's trap.

Peter did the same thing. He didn't blow out, he just collapsed through a slow but steady leak. In this session, we'll look at the components of his downfall and take a lesson. Hopefully some of us will patch the leak and strengthen our faith before we collapse—or seek restoration if we've already hit bottom.

I sure did that night in my room. The phone call came and the guard said, "I hope you learn something from this...but I've decided not to turn you in."

*But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you."
And all the others said the same. Mark 14:31*

Outline

*“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed that your faith may not fail.”
Luke 22:31-32.*

The devil was laying a trap for Peter. Jesus knew it, but Peter was blind, He fell right in
This outline draws principles from Peter’s fall that can help us prevent our own.

Peter’s Spiritual Collapse

1. **Peter boasted in his own strength.**

Like he was prone to do, Peter boasted that he would stay true to the Lord and even die for him. But his boast came from personal pride and confidence, not spiritual power and boldness.

Prevent Defense #1.....Stay humble!

“Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.” 1 Cor. 1:31

2. **Peter failed to pray.**

Jesus took the disciples to the garden to pray, as was his custom. He told his friends to pray that they would not fall into temptation. But they fell asleep. They allowed physical needs to override spiritual ones.

Prevent Defense #2.....Maintain an active prayer life.

“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” 1 Cor. 10:12

3. **Peter remained insensitive to spiritual issues.**

Jesus was overwhelmed with pain, and the disciples **knew** it. Jesus had told them. But they didn’t **feel** it. They were dull to the spiritual battle raging around them. The story of Gethsemane is a sad commentary on human insensitivity: It’s mind-boggling how they could sleep while Jesus suffered so much.

Prevent Defense #3.....Keep a soft heart by bearing one another’s burdens.

“Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus.” Phil. 2:4-5

4. **Peter fought only with physical weapons.**

It was Peter who slashed off the servant’s ear in Mark 14:47. That’s the only kind of battle Peter knew how to fight. Jesus rebuked Peter with the words, “No more of this! (Luke 22:51). Those words hold significance for us too. We are to fight no longer with worldly weapons, but with spiritual ones.

Prevent Defense #4.....Learn to use the Bible in spiritual conflict.

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power.” 2 Cor 10:4 “Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God.” Eph. 6:17

5. **Peter followed at a distance.**

Luke brings out this fact in 22:54. It’s a little sentence that’s ripe with meaning. Like every believer on the verge of collapse, this once bold man now followed at a distance...casually, half-heartedly, insincerely.

Prevent Defense #5.....At every opportunity, stand up and be counted for Christ.

“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this sinful time, I will be ashamed of him when I come in the Father’s glory.” Mark 8:38

6. **Peter forgot Christ’s warnings until it was too late.**

In the midst of his denial of Christ, Peter forgot the warning that his collapse would be complete before morning. It was only after he heard a rooster (Mark 14:72) and received a chilling stare from Jesus (Luke 22:61) that Peter remembered.

Prevent Defense #6....Heed the warnings of God!

“See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If others did not escape when they refused him who warned them, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?” Heb. 12:25



Discussion Guide

Open

- Have you ever made a major mistake and then wondered how you could have been so stupid? (Have a personal illustration to tell, then let kids share some of their stories. It might be a blown play, a “dumb” relationship, a forgotten assignment, or whatever.)
- Why are we often blind to our faults or mistakes until it’s too late? How is it that we don’t prevent more mistakes than we do?
- Spiritually, what sins do people often commit without seeing their mistakes—or the consequences—until it’s too late?

Dig In

1. **Transition into your Bible study time** by explaining that this week’s study deals with preventing spiritual collapse. All of us probably know someone who once seemed to be spiritually strong, but now is far from the Lord and in a mess. This week we’re talking about how to keep it from happening to us by looking at a classic example of spiritual collapse, in the life of Peter. An important concept needs to guide our thinking. It is this: For a Christian, spiritual collapse is never a blow-out, it’s always a slow leak. Even if it appears that someone just suddenly messes up by having an affair or committing a crime, there are always steps leading up to it.

2. **Set the stage**, then read Mark 14:27-51, 66-72.

3. **Discuss the situation:**

- Follow Peter’s words and actions through this passage. What clues do you see that Peter is on the road to denying Christ?
- Why do you think Peter so grossly overestimated his spiritual strength? One minute he was ready to die for Jesus, the next he was denying him. Why?
- What similar tests come our way that expose whether or not we’re as strong spiritually as we may claim?
- Retracing the steps to Peter’s collapse, what do you think he could have done to prevent it? (Supplement our discussion with material from the teaching outline.)
- What tips could you have given Peter for maintaining his spiritual strength?

Close

1. If a person has already had a major spiritual collapse, how can they recover? How did Peter come back?
2. How does accountability fit into a plan for preventing spiritual collapse?
3. How can we work together to keep ourselves growing and spiritually fit?