

Peter's Mistakes Leading to Failure

By: Howard Hendricks

Our speaker today, Dr. Howard Hendricks, has been professor of Christian education at Dallas Theological Seminary for over 30 years. The department began under his inspiration and he has built it into one of the outstanding departments in the seminary. He not only has taught me, he has taught my sons and looking at him today at how young he is. I think maybe he'll teach my grandchildren also. I had the dubious honor and distinction of pastoring a church that he had pastored in Fort Worth, Texas. And one of the first things I heard from one of the men in the congregation was I never heard that man preach a poor message. I said, well, I'm sorry that you have to have me now after all of that. When you talk about excellence in athletic field, you may talk about Joe DiMaggio's great streak. Fifty six games or the great Gretzky, who is still, I guess, involved unless he didn't score anything last night. Forty nine of the 50 games. But maybe Dr. Hendricks has the greatest record of all. Not only did that man sit in his congregation and hear outstanding messages, but at all the classes that I've had him, all the times I've heard him, I've never heard a poor message. This is really a great streak and a man who loves God. It's a delight to welcome him to Biola. We're honored to have you here, Dr. Hendricks. May the lord bless you as you speak to us at this time. [Applause]

Thank you, Dr. Johnston. I hope the Lord will forgive you for your exaggeration and he will forgive me for enjoying it. Well, good morning. I want to ask you a question. How many of you are night persons? Put your hands up. I thought so. How many of you are morning persons? Put

your hands up and keep them up. Keep them up. Will, the rest of you look around these are the significant people of this generation. Have you ever discovered how many night owls marry morning doves, God has a fantastic sense of humor. I think from in-utero I've been a morning person and I married a night owl and we had some delightful adjustments. Long around 9:30 in the morning and her fourth cup of coffee. Her second brain cell would come on. Ten o'clock at night, when any normal person is turning into a pumpkin, she is creative writers banging away at the typewriter, pulling out a sheet of paper. Hey listen to this Howie! And I'd be zonked. And then we got four children. And would you believe I only got four and a quarter morning persons? I mean, one and a quarter morning persons out of the lot. Kind of depressing, isn't it? I asked my older daughter, Barb, sometime ago. How about getting up and watching the sunrise with me, Barb? She said daddy if God intended people to watch the sunrise. He would have scheduled it a lot later in the day.

Well, what a delight to return to the ministry of the word at the Torrey Memorial Bible conference. You need another conference like you need another hole in the head, but you desperately need to hear from heaven. And I trust that the spirit of God will speak incisively to your needs during this week. I remember with deep appreciation for my days as a student at Wheaton College and later as a student and a faculty member at Dallas Theological Seminary. For weeks just like this, when God marked me permanently. And I trust that that will be your experience this week. If you have a Bible or a New Testament, may I invite you to turn in our father's word to the Gospel by Mark. Chapter 14. While you're turning there, may I remind you that this is not what Christ would say if he were here, but what he is saying because he is here. Have you ever wondered why there is so much failure recorded in the scriptures? It's quite

obvious to an even casual reader of this book that its pages are strewn with the wreckage and debris of men and women who have failed in their faith. And these facts of failure tell me two very important things about this book. They tell me, first of all, that God not man wrote this book. Man tends to gloss over the sins of his contemporaries. He whitewashes his fellow man, but not God. He's a realist. And when he paints a portrait of a man or a woman, he paints themwarts and all. But these facts of failure not only tell me that God wrote this book, they also tell me that the God who wrote this book was a God of grace, who wanted me to profit from the experience of failure in the life of other people so that I would not be sucked into the same traps.

I suppose there is no more familiar failure in all of the scriptures than the one detailed in Mark Chapter Fourteen, where you have a record of the defection of Peter. I would like to propose for your thinking today. That Peter's failure was not a blowout. It was a slow leak. In fact, it always is in the spiritual realm. Oh, I know it appears to you as if a person drops over the side of a precipice. You know, they seem to fall into sin so unexpectedly. Uh uh, it never happens that way. What you are seeing is simply the end product of a process that has been going on for some time. And for a few moments this morning, I'd like to trace for you the process of Peter's failure. I'll guarantee you it's the bottom line of Christian experience. Every man and woman in this auditorium is prone to make exactly the same mistakes and unfortunately often every day.

The first mistake that Peter made is found in verses twenty seven through thirty one. You might care to jotted in the margin of your Bible. It's the mistake of boasting to much. Now you need to understand that's a particular problem with young people. They tend to be overly confident, idealistic, self-assured. And by the way, that's not all bad. But there's a downside risk to it. You

see, our Lord said all of you will fall away. Verse twenty seven for it is written, I will strike. The shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. But after I am risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee. But, Peter, if you ever notice, whenever Peter enters the narrative, it's always with a thud. This man had a tremendous facility for opening his mouth putting both feet into it and wondering why he couldn't walk. He had the original hoof in mouth disease.

Peter declared. Even if all fall away, you can count on me. Lord, I don't know about the rest of these guys. But I'll hang tough. And the Lord in grace attempts to stab him awake by saying in verse 30. Today, Yes, Tonight, before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times. Peter, it's sooner than you think. But Peter insisted emphatically, even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. P.S. And all the others said the same. That's right Peter, that's exactly it. My devotion is so great Lord, it's willing to go to the point of death. You know, I've asked myself 100 hundred times what was Peter's problem? I don't think his problem was a problem of insincerity. I think Peter meant precisely what he said. In fact, as we're going to see in a few moments, he was willing to take on a hundred man single handedly to back up that claim. No, I question if Peter was ever more sincere than he was on this occasion. His problem was not a problem of insincerity. His problem was a problem of ignorance.

And that's your problem. That's my problem today. You see, whenever you say, Lord, you can count on me. You are about to step on a spiritual banana peel. You're going to sprawl in the faith. Shortly after I became a Christian, someone wrote in the flyleaf of my Bible these words, when I try, I fail when I trust he succeeds. There's a world of theology wrapped up in that couplet. Ladies and gentlemen, the flesh only knows one thing and that's failure and God has no self

improvement program for your flesh. If you should live to know Jesus Christ for 40, 50, 60 years, you would still be capable of all of the heinous sin for which the human heart has potential. No, my friends, those words that fell from the lips of our savior need to be etched into the ledger of our life without me you can do nothing. Oh the dreadful finality of those words. Something, nothing. But we don't believe that. All of us in a university such as this know that you can take a course and pass it with a high A without Jesus Christ. Some of us do it all the time. I'm here to tell you, if you don't know that it's possible to get on a platform such as this or to preach in a church and to preach very effectively from the standpoint of the audience without Jesus Christ. Some of us have done it all too frequently. You can do all kinds of things without Jesus Christ, but you can't be like Jesus Christ without Jesus Christ.

I'll never forget a member of the Dallas Cowboys who came to Christ. He was so motivated through a Bible study and he started to grow and he got into the texts, but he got so frustrated. And one day I was out at the locker room and he said to me, hey Doc, the Christian life is impossible. I said, Do you really believe that? Yeah. Really? I said, Fantastic. You've made the greatest discovery in your Christian life. In fact, you've discovered what many Christians who have been saved for 35 years never found out. And that is the Christian life is not difficult. It's impossible. It's a supernatural life. It's not until the Holy Spirit takes up his residence in your heart that you can ever live so as to please him. Dear friend of mine in Colorado gave me his old A.D.A. to drive across the state. Wonderful to sacrifice for Jesus, occasionally beautiful air conditioned car. And my wife and I were driving in the beautiful mountain section, and I was fascinated by a guy riding a bicycle. I mean, man, the guy could move that thing. But I also noticed we were going downhill and he was keeping up with me pretty well. In fact, for a while

he moved ahead of me as we got to the bottom of that thing. I could tell he was building up some momentum for the other side. And he took off up the other side and he was pumping for all he was worth. Perspiration pouring out of his face with me, driving the old, relaxed, cool, waving to him. The difference between him and me. Very simple. He's working up power. I'm releasing power already resident in the engine. You learned that secret about the Christian life yet? It's probably the most basic discovery you can ever make after you come to faith. And that is that the Christian life is the life of Christ. It's not what you are going to do for God, but rather what you are going to allow him to do in you watch the danger of a misplaced confidence.

The second mistake the Peter made and mark it well, always the product of the first, the second mistake that he made is found in verses 32 to 42. That is, he prayed too little. You see, whenever you boast too much, you will always pray too little. If I have adequate intellect, why pray? If I have adequate cash, why pray? It's only when I come to the place where I realize my need is not partial. It's total that I ever learn the significance of prayer. You know the story our Lord went to a place called Gethsemane took Peter James, and John said to them in verse thirty three. My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. You stay here and keep watch, and he goes a little further you'll remember, goes to the ground and prays that, if possible, that hour might pass from him. And then he returns verse thirty seven to his disciples and finds them sleeping. And he said, Peter, to Peter. Simon, are you asleep? The original language that's in the most emphatic position. It's as if the writer took a red pencil and underlined the little word. You, Simon? Are you asleep? You're the last person in the world that ought to be asleep. But he's out like a light.

You'll have to take this by faith. But I used to play baseball. This is back before the Earth's crust harden. And I still enjoy a good professional ball game in number of years ago, I took a neighbor that I was trying to cultivate for Christ. He has two boys and so do I. And so I took my boys, he took his boys. We went to see a professional ball game. With all of my interest in baseball, I have never seen a more boring game in my life. I just about fell asleep between pitches, but my neighbor was sitting on the edge of his chair, yelling his head off. At what I'll never know. Next Sunday, we took him to church. He was scarcely five minutes into the service before he was in the second or third stage of anesthesia. Will you notice our lord says, could you not keep watch for one hour, watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. You know, every now and then the church asks me to suggest a verse to put off over the front of their newly constructed auditorium. I've often thought this would be appropriate. Couldst not thou watch one hour?

While you're laughing, let me cram something down the center of your throat. How do you account for the fact that the one area, the one area in your Christian life in which you are constantly shot down in flames is your prayer life? There isn't a man or a woman in this auditorium who needs an exhortation to pray. Jesus Christ said men ought always to pray and never to throw in the towel. The apostle Paul said, Pray without interruption. Make it your breathing apparatus. James says, We have not because we ask not. And we ask and receive that because we ask it amiss that we may consume it upon our own lives. And yet I'm always bombed-out in my prayer. My friends that's not the product of an accident. That's the product of cultivation. The Devil doesn't mind if you study the Bible. Just so you don't pray, because then this will never get into your life, but you will develop a severe case of spiritual pride of which

there is none worse, devil doesn't mind if you share your faith. Just so you don't pray because he knows if you don't. That it's far more important to talk to God about men than it is to talk to men about God.

Devil doesn't mind if you get neurotically and compulsively active in Christian service just so you don't pray, because then you'll be deluded out of your gourd. He'll think, Man, I'm active. I'm doing something for Jesus, and all the time he'll know you're just active, but you're not accomplishing anything. But there's another reason I'm finding, most people are wiped out in this area, and I don't know together where this is sourced, but I'm finding as I move around among the people of God that most of us instinctively feel that you got to have a professional to pray in order for it to be valid. In fact, I think the next time I come into a meeting and they call on me to pray, I'm going to scream. I have the strongest urge to say isn't there anybody else around this outfit that can pray? Here comes, Reverend Hendricks say us a prayer. You know, I mean, they think we teach him to do that down at the cemetery.

That's why I love to work with new converts. I love to here them pray. Had here a guy come to Christ in Dallas sometime ago, came through a home Bible class, and in the follow up program, they suggested, you know, you ought to unite with a good Bible teaching church. The purpose of this class has been fulfilled. You've come to Christ. That's why it's designed. So, you know, his natural response is where do you go? So that's where he goes. So he goes to the church and morning service. The pastor gets up and says, you know, we have an evening service. We study the word love to have you pray with us, come with us and enjoy it. So he doesn't know enough not to show up. He shows up in the evening, Sunday evening, the pastor says. Now, on

Wednesday, we have a prayer meeting and Bible study love to have you join us. You know, this guy doesn't know enough not to come. He shows up Wednesday course when he grows up and is spiritually qualified to be elder. Then he won't show up like the elders. But in the meantime, beautiful. And I happened to be visiting in a church. And after the Bible study, which I was invited to conduct that night, we're going down a hall to a men's prayer meeting. And they had men over here and women over here and high school kids went down here in college and so forth. And he said to me, Hey, Howie, where are we going? We're going down here to pray. Boy he said good night. He said, I got a problem. I said, What's your problem? He said, I can't say it the way you guys say it. Jim, I said, thank God for that friend. Well, you know, he sat there quietly, hesitant to participate, and I sense something of his reluctance, so I reached over and squeezed his thigh. Never forget this guy's prayer as long as I live. I'd give anything to have this baby on a tape. He said, Lord, this is Jim. I'm the one that met you the other day. Remember? I really thought he would give God a zip code. And he said, I'm sorry, I can't say it the way the rest of these guys say it, but I just like you to know I really love you. Honestly, I do. Maybe after I know you for a while, I'll do better. Thanks a lot. I'll see you later. And you know what happened, my friends? He turned on a prayer meeting because he was praying. The rest were saying prayer. They were scraping the Milky Way.

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Because he was praying. The rest were saying prayer. They were scraping the Milky Way, reviewing their theology, taking their tour of the mission field, reminding everyone else of their sins. The thing that puts people under the pile. You ever go to a meeting where somebody talks

on prayer and they say, well, now, how many hours have you spent in prayer this last week? And everybody disappeared. Well, what a way to put a guy under a guilt trip. He gets so wiped out with that kind of jazz. One day it dawned on me, God is not impressed with your lingo, and he's not particularly impressed that you can log so many hours in a quiet room. What he really is interested in is where's your heart? You know, the thing that revolutionized my prayer life was when I started to pray in the available time that was mine, like driving my car along the highway, like going from my office to the chapel and seeing one of my students that I know is struggling with a problem he shared with me and asked me to pray with him. And asking God to continue to give him grace. You know who taught me that a number of laymen.

Have a guy that calls me up almost every week. I finally told my secretary put him through every time I need him. I'll pick up the phone and I'll say, hi Howie how are you doing? Great man! Yeah, I know. Where are you going this weekend? Well, I'm going out to Southern California. I'm going to speak and Chuck Swindell's Church going to speak over there at Biola University. Oh, great good, I'll pray for you. Those people out there really need some help. And you know what I'll say now, Lord, help Howie out! And he's on an on in prayer and here I am holding the phone out here. Most exciting thing in all of the world that's praying. Wouldn't it be delightful? Why? Good night, you're liable to transform this outfit all out of recognition fall over this campus. You know, under a clump of trees off, often a corner some place. You are two, three guys, gals. Who had the spiritual guts to recognize your need is not partial it's total. And you just sent up a couple sky telegrams to say, Lord, help us. We've lost our way. You know, it's just another set of classes today. And yet you preparing us for something. We need you far more than

we're even aware of it. Make it a good day. Not because we deserve it, because we desperately need it without you. Nothing.

Well, there's a third mistake he made. And again, mark the cause effect relationship very critical to notice the order of these mistakes. It's found in verses 43 through 50. It's the mistake of acting too soon. You get the connection? Whenever you boast too much. You pray too little. If you think God can count on you, then you're not going to count on God. And whenever you pray too little, you can be sure you're going to act too soon. Judas and a band of soldiers came under cover of darkness, armed with swords and clubs to seize our savior. In the verse forty seven we read when they went to seize him. One of those standing near another of the gospels tells us it was Peter, drew his sword, and struck the servant of a high priest cutting off his ear. You know, there's a lot of humor in the scriptures, and this is a case in point. You got a life-sized picture of this thing. You know here are the disciples out like a light from sheer exhaustion. Perhaps as a result of the brandishing of the swords or the scuffling of the soldiers feet the voices that were uttered. He comes in a partial consciousness, and he sees them seizing the Lord and says, Hey, now's the time to go into action. And he whips out his sword. Now he's got a couple of problems. First of all, he's sleepy. Anybody here identify with that? Somebody called me up some time ago in Dallas, about two thirty three o'clock in the morning. Who in the world would know what time it is? Want to know if this was Joe's Tavern? You know, I'm not sure I had the right end of the telephone to give him the information he was seeking. In the second place, he's angry. And by the way, a person who is angry is never under control. But in the third place, he's a fisherman and fishermen make poor swordsman.

You see, Roman soldiers were required to practice a minimum of an hour a day taking their sword out of their sheath, pivoting in this manner, bringing it back over their head so they could get full leverage, bringing it down in this way. The helmets were welded right down the middle. So if you could hit it with enough force and accuracy, you could split the helmet, dispose of the victim. Now there's no question in my mind this is what Peter's trying to do, but he's slightly off target. And I love particularly piecing all of the gospels together to find what's the sequence. Lord, said Peter put your sword away. You don't understand what it's all about. If my purposes were carnal, I could summon twelve legions of angels. They'd be dispatched from heaven in a moment and liquidate the enemy. My purposes are not carnal. They're spiritual. What mistake did he make? The one that you and I make a good two dozen times every day. You ever find yourself passive when you should be active? You ever find yourself active when you should be passive? You ever find somebody in the dormitory pass you a choice morsel of gossip. You know I shouldn't be telling you this Murrey. And that doesn't even sound right. So we usually add, you know, in order, that you might pray more intelligently and then we unload it. Oh, I wouldn't think of telling a person. And you can hardly wait to get out of there, to run down the hall, pass it on to somebody else. A half hour goes by and you've got the choicest opportunity to share your faith and it's as if you got lockjaw. You're silent in twenty seven languages.

That's beater's brow. You see, when he should have been active in prayer, he was passive in sleep, when he should have been passive in resignation to the will of God he's active with the sword. And my friends, I happen to believe the greatest crimes perpetrated by the evangelical community are perpetrated by people who are acting without bathing their actions in prayer. And that's a dangerous thing. I've been to church board meetings where we've had a word of prayer,

booted the Holy Spirit out the front door and went at it like cats and dogs and devastated the testimony. I saw a man with a 37 year old ministry, one of the finest ministries I ever saw in my life, lose his joy. The last time he spoke and he cut loose. Shot his mouth off and undercut thirty seven years of ministry.

I've seen people tear a marriage apart just to shreds because they're acting in the flesh. Not in the spirit. Now, I want you to see one final mistake. Don't miss this one or you miss it all found down in the last sequence, which is in verses sixty six to seventy three. And that's the mistake of thinking too little and too late. Verse 66, when Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. And when she saw Peter warming himself, she'd look closely at him. You also were with that Nazarene Jesus, she said. But he denied it. I don't know or understand what you are talking about. Who said that? Why the man who said you can count on me. And when the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing by. Literally, the text says she kept saying to those that stand by. This is one of them. This is one of them. This is one of them. Nothing like a persistent woman. And he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, surely you're one of them because you're a Galilean and a Galilean had an accent much thicker than a Bronx accent or a deep Texas or Southern accent. You could spot him like that. I met a student on campus, I guess, a year before last. I'd never met him before. We got talking for a while and I turned to him and said, what part of Canada are you from? So how do you know that I'm from Canada? I said, because I've been there. You see, his accent gave him away. Now look at verse seventy one. And he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them. I don't understand this man you are talking about. And if you are sitting there saying that would never happen to me, then you are already on the same road that

Peter took. Because that's how it got started. You can count on me. My devotion is so great. I'll die for you. Verse seventy two says immediately. The rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him before. The rooster crows twice you will disown me three times. And he broke down and wept. See he thought but unfortunately, it was too little. It was too late.

Ladies and gentlemen, the unexamined life is not worth living. Christianity has been given a bad press. Many people think that when you come to faith, you sort of throw your mind into neutral. You put your head in a bucket and fire a forty five in it commit intellectual suicide. Nothing could be further from the biblical truth. Jesus said the greatest commandment is this that you shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your strength and with all your mind. Julian, the apostate in the third century, was determined to wipe out every trace of Christianity. To his disgust, he learned the law of spiritual thermodynamics, namely the greater the heat, the greater the expansion. The more he persecuted the thing, the more it flourished. He finally got his little scraggly band of followers around him in an upper room and he shouted to them Christianity provokes too much thinking why even the slaves are thinking which to a Roman mind was incredible, because the Romans said slaves do not think. But ladies and gentlemen, slaves do think under the impact of the word of God. Do you? You know, the most searching part of my life for the last 10 years, I have conducted an informal research program, mostly for myself and also to help young people.

I have been interviewing people who are successful in every walk of life, every profession, every kind of business. Most of these people are 55, 60, 65, 70 and older. And I said, OK, you ended

up at the top of the pile. How's that grab you? Are you fulfilled? Men and women, I want you to know. Unfortunately, even in the Christian community, not that many who were saying, yep. It's been worth it all.

I'd do it exactly the same way. The only change I'd make is I'd go more for broke for Jesus Christ. The wealthiest man in the city of Dallas sat across my desk, made a statement that engraved itself in my mind. I remind myself of this every every day of the week. He said to me Hendrix, I spent all of my life climbing the ladder of success, only to discover that when I got to the top, my ladder was leaning against the wrong wall.

The sad story, but many a person you see young people, you've got to ask yourself some very searching questions right now. And that is what is it that's going to what will it take to give you fulfillment?

I'm not talking about now. I'm talking about at the end of the trolley line. When it's all over, when you've made your bucks, when you've established your position, when you end up at the top of your pile, but discover you're at the bottom of life. I've been in this a long time. Fascinates me. I've never had somebody come to me and say Hendriks. I'd like to screw up my life. You've been at this a long time.

I need your input. [audience laughs] And I say very lovingly, but very directly. Just keep going the way you are. You could succeed. My greatest fear for you is not that you will fail. My greatest fear for you is that you will succeed. In doing the wrong thing. Or because you didn't

take enough time to think. Now, the amazing thing about the story is that Peter's failure was not fatal. First time Jesus Christ met Peter described in John 1:42, he said, Thou art Simon, thou shalt be called Cephas, which by interpretation means rock the before the after took considerable time before the Lord got him Simonized.

but when you finally achieve that dance, it was men of Peter's ilk of whom the pagan world testified. These are they that have turned the world upside down. If Peter could speak at the Torrey Memorial Bible conference, and I believe he has, he would say, my brothers and sisters in Christ. Don't boast so much. What the danger of a misplaced confidence without the savior. You can do nothing, he'd say.

Don't pray so little. Your name is not partial. It's total, he'd say. Don't act so soon, I know you will always act in the energy of the flesh.

Not in the power of the spirit. And I think he would pause. And with a note of gravity, he would say.

And for God's sake think, think! Before it's eternally. Too late. Shall we pray together? Our father, may we be not only faithful hearers of your word, but consistent, faithfully responding to the truth. May we hear the message and apply it as the spirit of God makes our hearts and minds like warm, fertile soil. And may we be those who hear and do your will in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.