

Buzz King  
[buzz@BuzzKing.com](mailto:buzz@BuzzKing.com)  
BuzzKing.com  
303 437 7419

### **Matthew 26:30–35, ESV**

*<sup>30</sup> And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. <sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ <sup>32</sup> But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” <sup>33</sup> Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” <sup>35</sup> Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.*

### **Acts 2:37–41, ESV**

*<sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” <sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

### **Fish all over the floor.**

When I was fifteen there was an earthquake in southern California that knocked down freeway overpasses, destroyed much of a large hospital, and destroyed many residential, retail, and industrial buildings. Our house was near the

epicenter. It happened very early in the morning, before rush hour, which was the apparent reason that there were so few casualties. The number of deaths was surprisingly small. School was of course cancelled. My immediate reaction right after the house stopped shaking was that I had taken my planarian home from science class; we had just cut them in half, and I was waiting to watch the missing half grow back. Our family had left a huge mirror propped up against the wall in the hallway of our tiny house; it was shattered, and my father ran barefoot through broken glass to see if the three of us kids were okay. Just a couple of days before, my brother and I had switched beds, which meant that he was sleeping under a tall cinder block and board bookshelf that we had built; it landed on him, causing some bruising on his face. Nobody else in our house was hurt. The kitchen floor buckled, and ever after that, there was a hump that you could trip on. The duct work in the house was fractured in multiple places and the chimney fell.

But ours was a single-story house and it was wood frame. It flexed with the quake and there was, all in all, very little damage. Most of the houses in our neighborhood, however, were two stories tall and had significantly more damage. Up and down the street, there were houses with heavy structural damage. The nearby freeways were destroyed. Interestingly, the heavy damage caused by that

quake caused engineers to develop more earthquake resistant freeway designs, and the freeways that were then built to replace the damaged ones have survived multiple, hard quakes since then. My high school, many miles away, suffered much damage, and when the school finally reopened many weeks later, I discovered that the forty-foot steeple on the chapel, which had fallen off during the quake, had been replaced with a short, stubby thing.

The morning after the quake, a buddy of mine and I got in his motorcycle and rode around town looking at the damage. Much of the old downtown of where we lived at the time, which is in an area that is now called Santa Clarita, suffered minor to moderate damage. As we rolled through fallen bricks and broken glass, listening to burglar alarms ring, we came to the tropical fish store where I bought the fantail mollies that I liked to breed at home; I would sell the babies back to the fish shop. We got off the motorcycle and stepped through the broken glass door. Inside, almost all the aquariums were on the cement floor. There was glass, water, and dead fish everywhere. The woman who owned the place stood in the center of the huge mess, her hands to her face, crying. I vividly remember her saying something like “I’m ruined. I’m not insured for any of this.”

I’ll get back to this story, but let’s first look at our first Bible quote. Our quote from Matthew comes from just before Jesus and the Apostles head for

Gethsemane, where the Apostles will famously fall asleep right after Jesus asks them to please stay awake while he prays. Jesus is awaiting his arrest. He knows that he will be tried and killed. This is from our first quote:

*<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." <sup>35</sup> Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.*

Jesus tells Peter that Peter will, when challenged by people who are present when Jesus is arrested, lose his courage and deny being with Jesus. Peter claims he will not. But then, he does indeed let his fear get the better of him, and he denies being a believer. This is a tremendous failure on his part, and we might think that Peter's days as the leader of the Apostles and the stone on which Jesus will build his church are over.

But in our second quote, we are in the Book of Acts. Jesus has risen. He has handed the job of spreading the faith to his Apostles. The Holy Spirit has descended on the Apostles. Peter now emerges as a true leader. He is speaking to Jews. The time has not yet come for others, like Paul to spread the faith to Gentiles. People are asking Peter and the other Apostles what they should do. They are asking for spiritual guidance. In our second quote from the Bible, we hear Peter declare the following to those who are seeking his advice:

*“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.... Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” <sup>41</sup>*

We are told that those who received his word were baptized, and that in fact there were about three thousand people baptized that day.

The point is that Peter, the man who once failed horribly, worse than any of us have ever failed at anything, ultimately becomes the seed of the new church. The faith will eventually spread outward from Jerusalem, and this speech that Peter makes in Acts is widely regarded as the very beginning of the birth of the church.

In truth, we all face failure. Often it is our own fault, often it is not. Usually, it doesn't matter. Spouses run off. Jobs are lost and careers are lost. We find ourselves hopelessly upside-down on a mortgage. We spend years and several tens of thousands of dollars on secondary education and we never get a job in our area of study. We get into legal trouble. Sometimes the failure is extremely horrific: a child dies, we get a diagnosis of metastasized cancer, the legal trouble we got into leads to a ruined life. Do we always bounce back and rise again, as Peter did?

Well, sometimes not in a way we would have predicted. Perhaps if I had failed at getting tenure, I would have become a pastor at a much younger age. I am indeed happier now. Sometimes success proves many years later to be failure. A lot of what happens after failure is how we perceive the future. Have we given up? Do we believe that there is no way that a success that overwhelms the failure could ever happen? Even if it's true, and what has happened to us is so tragic, so overwhelming that we cannot recover from it, we find that we have no choice but to turn our futures over to God. It's when we can do that – that is when we know that God will lift us up. Nothing will replace a dead child. But continuing to live, holding that love you have for that child close to you, holding close the love that child gave you, and knowing that you can never lose that love and that someday, you will hold your child again – that is called faith. Your personal nightmare will give you empathy for others, if you let it. Then as you step through life, though the Kingdom of God, you will be surprised at what God will let you do with that empathy.

By the way, that woman rebuilt her business. My friend and I, several months after the earthquake, walked past that store. We went in. There were new aquariums on the metal shelves. It turned out that she had found a tropical fish store that was going out of business. So, she bought the man's stock,

including his equipment, cheaply. With a smile on her face, she told us how she had found a way to get back into business without borrowing much money at all. I told her that her new store looked better than the old, which was true. She beamed and said that indeed, although she had no earthquake insurance and had to pay for everything herself, she was able to do things better the second time. She had a brand-new section to her store, one devoted to salt water fish, which some businesses, like medical offices, were buying because they are so much more colorful than fresh water fish. She was spending a certain amount of time maintaining huge tanks now, in those businesses.

That business remained there for many years after the earthquake. I can remember when I was much older, and in graduate school, visiting my parents and going to that shop. The same woman was running it. She had several employees and the store was packed with customers. I reminded her of who I was, the boy who had sold her black fantail mollies that he had bred at home. She grinned and hugged me and told me it was great to see someone from the old days, someone who was there when she was at the bottom.

There is a failure that all of us as believers are experiencing right now. It's the crumbling of the Church. Churches are being shuttered. Huge evangelical churches have survived better, but all in all, there are far fewer practicing

Christians in the United States than there were thirty years ago. Many people are wondering if we have hit bottom yet. But there have been very successful revivals in the past, where dwindling church memberships have led to a rethinking of how we should practice our faith. This has led to some very positive changes. And churches are doing well in other parts of the world, like Central and South America, parts of Asia, and Africa. It could be that one day, those folks will evangelize Americans. Many of the immigrants coming into this country now are believers and they are helping to populate our churches. The day might come when Christianity will be like Peter, going from the depths of failure to a truly exalted level of success.

What we have to do is not let failure break us. We have to see failure as an opportunity to change. It often forces us to do something that we wouldn't have had the courage to do otherwise. Right now, during the pandemic, there are people who are taking restaurants that were barely surviving before the pandemic, and they are turning them into very low overhead food delivery services; some of these restaurants are doing better than before. This church could be forced to close again, and if we do, then we will go online and keep this congregation together - and we will come out of this stronger and closer to God. Please pray with me.

*God, all of us fail in life. We fail at small things and we fail at big things. Give us the faith to know that you are there, that you never put a burden on us that we cannot overcome. You never give us a burden that will not lead us to be more than we were before.*

*Peter knew that he had failed. The Bible tells us that after he denied Jesus, he went out and wept bitterly. But he did not let this huge failure break him. He became determined to be the Apostle, the leader that Jesus needed. God, let me be like Peter. Let me take every failure as an opportunity to learn, to turn to you and seek your guidance more than ever, and to become more than I could have become without that failure.*

*In fact, God, when you see me being lazy, not challenging myself, and not being the Christian you know I can be, please throw failure at me. Let me be temporarily broken so that I may become the person you know I should be.*

*And let me always be empathetic to others when they have failed. Let me take them by the hand and help them rise up and succeed. Amen.*