

# Explore the Bible: Denied

April 19, 2021

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for May 9 focuses on Luke 22:54-62.*

If there is anything more painful than someone betraying our trust it would be difficult to identify it. If our property is stolen it can be replaced. If our personal loyalties are broken, they are extremely difficult to rebuild. Nothing hurts more than broken trust.

One of the most curious things about Jesus is that, as he faced the cross, he knew he'd have to face it alone. The sheer terror of it all was too much even for the disciples. When Peter was faced with staying loyal to Jesus or protecting himself, he did what many of us would do.

Jesus knew Peter would deny him then double down on the denial. He knew Peter would draw his sword and cut the soldier's ear off. Yet, even facing all of that, Jesus displayed his true nature by the way he responded to denial.

## Making empty promises

Peter displays his full humanity by the way in which he so easily and so quickly flipped from being willing to be violent in order to protect Jesus to denying Jesus three times. We would be wise to pay attention to Peter's empty promise to Jesus.

One of the most dangerous things we can do is promise ourselves or others or even God what we never would do. There is something about our nature that, oddly, our promises can set us up for the very failure in which we promised we would never be involved.

We trust our promises too much. We tend to think that our promises in some way or another means we've achieved what we promised.

In my personal experience, I look back with great anguish on those times I broke virtually every promise I ever made to God. With rarest exception, every sin I ever committed was preceded by me saying to myself or others, "I would never!"

There is no sin, not one, of which we are not all capable of committing. We may say, for example, that we'd never stray from our marital vows. We believe that, because we made a vow of faithfulness at the wedding altar, we have automatically shielded ourselves from even the temptation to stray.

In fact, every promise we make to God must be kept up to date, sometimes daily. One friend who is a recovering alcoholic hasn't had a drink in years. Yet, he still attends three AA meetings every week. He's not taking anything for granted.

## **Finding ourselves in the biblical story**

There is the history of Peter's denial of which those of us were raised attending Sunday school since we were infants are well aware. There is a reason God saw fit to preserve that history. However, we miss the point of Peter's failure if we only see it as history.

As with most of Scripture, we must find ourselves in Peter's story. We must daily remind ourselves faithfulness is a one-day-at-a-time discipline. In some cases, it's a moment-to-moment discipline.

Another friend tells me of being on a business trip to a large city and staying in a very nice hotel. He and some business colleagues were having dinner in the hotel's restaurant in which the bar was also located.

He said that he noticed some “ladies of the night” hanging around the bar looking for customers. He went on to confess that even to simply lay eyes on them presented what easily could become an insurmountable temptation. He kept his vows of loyalty to his wife by excusing himself from the business dinner and going to his room before his eyes even strayed.

## **Accepting our full humanity**

While alcohol and adultery may have never presented themselves as temptation to any given person, no one who, having promised to follow Jesus, can presume to believe they are above any temptation. Again, there is no sin which any of us are incapable of committing. To deny that is to deny our full humanity.

When Jesus saw and heard Peter deny him three times, he and Peter’s eyes met. Not a word was transacted between the two. All it took was one glance from Jesus for Peter to come face to face with his own sin. All of which created such great remorse in Peter’s soul that he went out and “wept bitterly.”

It can probably be said that, until we’ve done that bitter weeping of broken promises, especially to God, we have not fully come to accept our full humanity. At the same time, it’s vital to watch how Jesus responded to Peter’s denial.

Although Peter had betrayed him, Jesus refused to deny Peter. He didn’t say one word of condemnation to Peter. He simply looked him in the eye, went to the cross and died for Peter and for every soul ever born.

In the full light of Jesus’ grace, Peter was later declared to be the “rock” on which Jesus would build his church (Matthew 16:18). It must have been that, when Jesus looked into Peter’s eyes, he saw beyond that one moment of betrayal to see what Peter could and would become.

Jesus always is watching and always forgiving, never denying us, even if we deny him. Jesus looks beyond the denial to the person who, in following him, we can and will become.

*Glen Schmucker is a writer and blogger. He has served as a Texas Baptist pastor and as a hospice chaplain.*