Failures Forgiven

Key References: Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 18; The Desire of Ages, chaps. 75, 76, pp. 698-722; The Bible Story (1994), vol. 9, pp. 78-87; Our Beliefs nos. 7, 9, 4
Imagine one of your friends betraying you. Imagine the rest of your friends running away and leaving you to face a mob of angry people. Imagine forgiving and encouraging them anyway.

A full moon shines over Jerusalem. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus stands over His sleeping disciples. Suddenly a mob breaks through the trees. “Who is it you want?” Jesus asks calmly. The disciples stagger to their feet. What’s going on? they wonder. The mob answers. “Jesus of Nazareth.” “I am He,” says Jesus. (See John 18:4, 5.) Judas steps forward from the mob. “Greetings, Rabbi!” Judas pretends happy surprise as he greets Jesus with a customary kiss. The money that the priests gave him jingles in the pouch at his belt. Judas pulls away, but Jesus looks into his face.

“Like Jesus, we can forgive and encourage our friends even when they fail us.”

“But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32).
“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” Jesus still speaks calmly. (See Luke 22:48.) But Judas turns away from Jesus. His mind is made up. Even Jesus’ look, right into his heart, cannot move him to change now.

“Secure Him,” someone yells. The mob surges forward. The other disciples are wide awake now. They can’t believe their eyes. Jesus is actually letting them arrest Him.

“Let’s get out of here!” shouts Peter as the mob starts away with Jesus.

Yet Peter can’t stay away not knowing what’s happening to his Master. He and John go to the courtyard outside the meeting place of the Sanhedrin.

John goes inside. He gets as close to Jesus as he can. Peter squats near a fire to get warm. As the light from the flames flickers on Peter’s face a woman servant looks at him carefully. She had noticed that he had come in with John, and she sees the sad look on Peter’s face. “This man was with Him,” she says. Suddenly all the people around the fire look at Peter. A shiver runs across Peter’s shoulders. He pretends he doesn’t understand her. “Woman,” Peter says with a cough. “I don’t know Him.” A rooster crows. Someone else looks at him and says, “You also are one of them.”

“Man, I am not!” Peter moves from the fire to a wall of the courtyard.
Time passes. Another servant walks by Peter. “Certainly this fellow was with Him, for he is a Galilean.”

Peter can’t stand it. He feels embarrassed to be identified with Jesus’ followers. The anger in his voice makes his words loud. Peter swears, saying, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” (See verses 56-60.)

The rooster crows again. This time Peter hears it. Suddenly he remembers Jesus’ words spoken just a few hours ago, “Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.” (See verse 34.) At this very instant Jesus turns from the judges to look at
Peter. The look of love and forgiveness shoots into Peter’s heart like an arrow. He remembers his own words of a few hours ago, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.” (See verse 33.) He rushes back to Gethsemane. He falls onto the cold ground where earlier Jesus had prayed to His Father. On this very spot Peter weeps with deep regret over his betrayal of the Master. He realizes that if he had listened to Jesus, if he had prayed instead of sleeping, he would have had the strength he needed to admit he was Jesus’ disciple.

Peter failed Jesus when he denied knowing Him. All of the disciples had failed Jesus when they were arguing about which one of them would be the greatest. Peter, James, and John had failed Jesus when they fell asleep time after time when Jesus had asked them to watch and pray with Him. Judas failed Jesus when he betrayed Him.

Jesus knew the weaknesses of His disciples, but He still loved each of them. Later, when they remembered that Jesus had told them that all these things would happen, they realized that Jesus loved them even though He knew they would do hurtful things.

All but Judas were drawn by Jesus’ love. He had tried to prepare them for the experience of His death, but they had been too focused on themselves to pay attention. They weren’t ready when Jesus was arrested and killed. But they found courage remembering Jesus’ words of comfort.

His love and encouragement gave them hope as they were about to face the greatest disappointment of their lives—the suffering and death of their dear Master.
**Instructions:** Cross off in the grid the words in red in the following Bible verse. The words you want to cross off appear either backward or upward. Displayed in the grid only once are the words ‘the’ and ‘is’. The remaining letters spell out a Bible verse that teaches us about our responsibilities toward one another.

“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

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