

Pacesetters Devotional
Luke 22:31,32

Luke 22:31 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you (all) like wheat; ³² but I have prayed for you (Simon Peter), that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

What a strange statement! Jesus uttered it after His final supper with His disciples, as they were on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew that Judas had betrayed Him. He knew that His arrest was imminent. He knew that all of His eleven remaining disciples would forsake Him to save their own skins. And He knew that Simon Peter, their leader, would deny three times that he even knew Him. Jesus’ statement was both a warning and an encouragement to Peter. It can be a warning and encouragement to us as well.

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you (all) like wheat.” Both the repetition of Peter’s birth-name “Simon” and the emphatic “behold” were designed to get his attention concerning the imminent danger. The Hebrew name “Simon” was associated with instability, and Jesus told Peter that he was about to enter a storm that could capsize his immature, unstable faith. As the leader of his fellow-disciples, Jesus alerted Peter that this storm was about to break upon *all* of them. The author of this storm was God’s adversary, Satan, and his goal was to “sift you (all) like wheat” – a Hebrew idiom similar to our English idiom “to pick someone apart.” The fact that Satan “demanded permission” for this sifting recalled the story of Job, in which Satan insisted that God allow him to launch a devastating attack on Job’s faith (Job 1,2).



For reasons that we cannot fully fathom, God allows this satanic sifting of all of His servants. This is why Peter later warned whole church communities to “Be on the alert, for your adversary the devil is prowling about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). God warns us that these attacks on our faith are coming, and that succumbing to them can be very harmful both to us and to those who are associated with us. Yet even this warning contains encouragement. God forewarns us so that we can be ready – “forewarned is forearmed.” And God will not allow Satan to attack Job or Peter or us beyond our faith-capacity. Rather, He will provide us with a way to endure the attack (1 Corinthians 10:13). Knowing this promise is crucial when the sifting breaks upon us!

Next Jesus gave Peter even more powerful encouragement: “*But I have prayed for you (Simon Peter), that your faith may not fail . . .*” Jesus’ prayer did not mean that Peter’s resistance was guaranteed; it did not overturn his freedom to choose. “**That** your faith **may** not fail” is different than “**so** your faith **will** not fail.” Rather, Jesus assured Peter that His prayer mysteriously unleashed all of the spiritual help that he needed to survive the imminent sifting.

What an encouragement to know that Jesus prays for us! He prayed for the spiritual welfare of all who would believe in Him through His disciples’ testimony (John 17:20ff.). And He intercedes for us even now so that nothing can separate us from God’s love (Romans 8:34,35). Though we usually do not sense His prayers, they unleash everything we need for our times of sifting. Knowing this can greatly strengthen us to resist the enemy. And even if we cave into Satan’s attack (as Peter did), we know that Jesus is still for us.

“*And you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.*” Finally, Jesus encouraged Peter by implicitly promising to redeem even his failure. After he turned back to Jesus, Peter could actually be a source of strength for his fellow-disciples to recover from their sifting. How helpful it must have been for the other disciples to

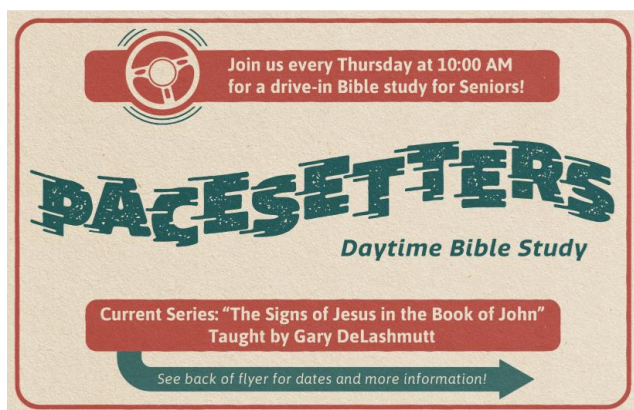


hear how Jesus personally forgave and re-commissioned Peter (John 21:15-17)! What a wonderful irony that Peter, the one who denied Jesus, has through his letters strengthened innumerable Christians who have wilted under Satan's attacks!

If Jesus could restore Peter after his dramatic failure, certainly He can restore you! Do you realize that your faith-lapses do not disqualify you from being used powerfully by God to strengthen other Christians? No matter how great your faith-failures have been, God's grace is bigger still – "Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more" (Romans 5:20). So reject Satan's lies that your sins have ended your ministry. Turn back to Him, honestly acknowledge your failure, and cast yourself on His strong mercy. Then go in the strength of Jesus' restoring love to strengthen your brethren! Your humble honesty about your failures, coupled with your testimony about Jesus' mercy, may strengthen others more than your stories of spiritual success!

Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You know us better than we know ourselves – and yet You love us more than we can imagine. You know the storms that are coming to attack our faith. You know about all of our faith-lapses, large and small. Yet You love us according to Your great mercy, not according to our righteousness. You pray for our protection when we are sifted, and You initiate our restoration when we fall. You know how You intend to use even our failures to strengthen others like us. May Your unmerited love receive the recognition it deserves!

**Come hear Gary in person at our Pacesetters Drive-in Bible Study!
10AM Thursdays at Dwell Main Campus**

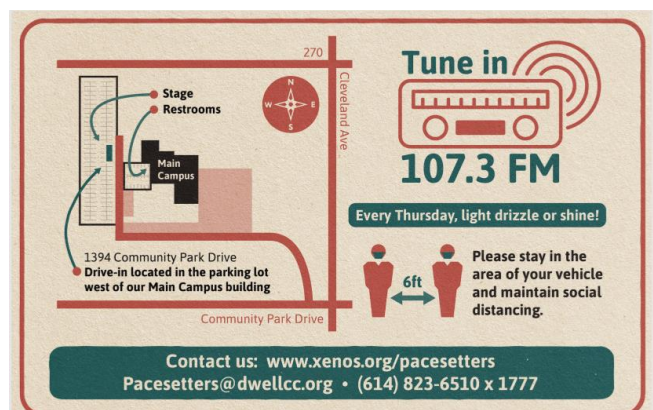


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Current Series: "The Signs of Jesus in the Book of John"
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See back of flyer for dates and more information!



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