

FORGIVING CHALLENGE – WEEK 5

RESTORATION

Today I want to talk to you about what does God think of you when you are an absolute failure?

Every person experiences failure of some sort in their life. Some people have big failures. For others their failures are pretty small and inconsequential.

One man wanted to be a cartoon artist. He started a studio, but went bankrupt. He tried again, but lost his staff and the rights to all his drawings. At one point, he was so poor and desperate, he resorted to eating dog food just to survive. Finally, his art found some success when he drew a cartoon mouse – Mickey Mouse. That man was Walt Disney.

Most success stories in our world begin with failure. President Ulysses S. Grant found himself out of the Army at age 32, married, several children, but he couldn't support his family. He bounced from job to job, moving in with his wife's parents to help with their farm. They were so poor that he sold his pocket watch just to buy Christmas presents for his family. Finally, he rejoined the Army out of desperation at the beginning of the Civil War, and rose to success and the presidency.

Most people after trying once, maybe twice, quit for good. We never hear about them again. And most people when they fail, give up, and abandon their dreams.

What have you failed at? I don't just mean little things like getting an F on a spelling test in grade school. I mean the big things in life, like failing at marriage and you're embarrassed to talk about your Ex and how it all ended. Or you got promoted to your dream job, but found it didn't fit you so you quit, or maybe got let go. Or you announced to the world your great plans, only eat your own words later.

We know how much Jesus believed in and entrusted to Peter. We know the bold promises that Peter made. And we know how badly Peter failed Jesus by denying him not once. Not twice. But

three times by a charcoal fire as he was warming his hands. Peter completely folded. Peter went from a faithful follower to a failure.

In the past weeks we've looked at his sin, how Jesus' death on the cross paid the penalty of Peter's sin, and how Jesus came back to free Peter.

Jesus came back for Peter one morning at the lake. The Bible tells us: ***“Simon Peter, Thomas ..., Nathanael ..., the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ‘I’m going out to fish,’ Simon Peter told them, and they said, ‘We’ll go with you.’ So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.”***

After Peter's failed by flat-out denying Jesus, Peter goes back to fishing. His previous profession. This is sad, right? For three years, he had seen firsthand all that Jesus has done. Peter's life was filled with purpose and meaning. The first moment that Jesus met him He changed his name from Simon, to Peter, the rock, the big boulder, and said to Peter, nothing wrong with fishing for fish, but, from now on you'll be fishing for men.

But what is Peter doing now? Fishing for fish again. Having failed, he goes back to a lesser life. Peter is going back to being Simon. Too many of us after we've failed, believe the lie of the enemy that we are unfit, unqualified, and unworthy of Christ's love and His call to serve. So, we step back into a lesser life. We believe the lie that our sin and failure have disqualified us.

We tend to go through this life waffling back and forth. Even though we are called Peter, we sometimes still feel like, or live like, or want to go back to Simon. When we fail, rather than being Peter, we settle back into Simon. ***“I messed up, so I can't be Peter...I got to go back to being Simon. I'm going back to fishing.”***

Now, we have to understand that when Peter says he's going fishing, it's not like we do around here. We go fishing for recreation. Fishing is a chance to be in nature, forget about things, and most importantly, drink beer. That's how we fish. But this is Peter. He's a professional fisherman. He's not just passing time. Peter is the guy who left his fishing business to follow Jesus and catch people.

He was out fishing all night. That's the way the pros would have done it. He's given up, quit, and gone back to his old life.

Isn't that what we do when we fail. We go between distractions and busyness and we step away from what God wants to do in our lives. We retreat into what is comfortable – a lesser life we know.

The other sad thing about this...Peter got other disciples of whom Jesus had also called to greater things to also join him in fishing. So not only did Peter go back into a lesser life, he was now inviting the other disciples back into this lesser life.

When we fail, when we fall back, we tend to drag others back down with us. Many of us think, well, this just affects me. No, it doesn't. You influence others. You've heard the phrase, "Hurt people tend to hurt people." There's truth to that.

And while fishing, the disciples caught nothing all night. These guys are professional fishermen and they catch nothing. They even failed at quitting and retreating into a safe and familiar occupation. No fish! The disciples might have thought what a disgrace. But actually this is God's grace. God's grace works in unusual ways. This is not a coincidence. I mean, seriously, 7 men with a history of fishing, not catching a single thing the entire night on a sea that they knew like the back of their hands?!

Do you know that when you try to run away from God's call on your life, God usually complicates things. Your turning back from God doesn't go smoothly. Unexpected problems pop up. Like Jonah – God called him to go east. Jonah didn't want to go so he got on a ship heading west. Then they get into a terrible storm. He gets thrown overboard, is swallowed by a whale, spends 3 days in the whale's stomach until he gets vomited up on some beach. Yuck! Talk about complications! And if you are on a path that leads to away from what God clearly wants for you – whether you're running away fast or slow doesn't matter -- God will usually complicate things in your life first as He pursues you, comes after you.

So Jesus goes after His disciples. The Bible tells us, *⁴Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize*

that it was Jesus. ⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

That’s a loaded question! He’s asking a question like Dr. Phil asks these days, “How’s that working out for you?” Jesus is saying, *“Hey guys. You quit following me to fall back into your old life of fishing. How’s that working out for you? Haven’t you any fish?”*

Fishermen are not particularly known for being truthful. Ask a fishman what they caught and they’re likely to tell you about “the big one that got away,” or the record setting 3 foot long perch that they thought would be a shame to keep so they released it.” When I was a boy my grandfather used to say, “All fishermen are liars except you and me. ... And sometimes I’m not so sure about you.”

The disciples did something kinda amazing here. Jesus asked them, ***“Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered.*** They admitted the truth. Restoration begins with admitting the truth. Remember we’ve been using the SCARS acronym. “S” stands for sin – that’s recognizing the reality about ourselves. “C” is confession – that’s admitting the truth to God. “A” is absolution, or forgiveness given by God for Jesus’ sake. That’s what we spent last week on. All of those need to happen before the “R” of restoration.

The disciples are honest – that’s rare for fishermen – ***“No. We’ve caught nothing. No fish.”*** So, Jesus says, ***“Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”***

So they, for some reason, listened to this advice from a landlubber, threw the nets about 10 feet the other direction...and ***When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.***

This is the second time that Peter has seen this fish miracle take place. The first time this miracle happened, Jesus invited Peter to come and join Jesus on a 3-year adventure of being His disciple. The first time Jesus changed his name from Simon, to Peter, the rock, the solid faith foundation for all who would follow Christ thereafter.

By recreating this first miracle, and later that same morning, inviting the disciples to eat breakfast with Jesus, and then after eating talking to Peter directly, asking Peter 3 times if he loved Jesus, and then 3 times asking Peter to feed Jesus' sheep – care for His people – through all of this Jesus was (1) Inviting Peter to return into relationship with Him, and (2) issuing again Jesus's call to Peter to a Christ follower and leader of His people.

And it's the same with you...how does God treat you in your failure? He's kind. He's gentle. He's welcoming. There are many that have a flawed view of our God. They see Him as an angry God...a judge. Someone that's out to get us. To smite us. Today instead see just how much God forgives you. It's one thing to free a man from a punishment they deserve. It's another to restore the relationship. And God's forgiveness does both.

So, friend, don't let the failures of your past determine your future. We all fail! All of us blow it. But, as we honestly bring those failures to God in confession, He forgives. God forgives because Jesus took all your sins, all your mistakes, all your weaknesses on Himself. Jesus carried them all to the cross. He paid for them all with the unimaginable value of giving His life – the life of the Son of God – offered to cover all the cost. And God doesn't see you as a broken failure of a person. He sees you through the gift that He has declared over you – He sees you innocent and holy. God sees you now as sinless, and pure, and loved incredibly by God, because Jesus' pure life has been placed over you, covers you from head to toe, and that is who you actually are now.

I love how yesterday's chapter in the workbook put this so pointedly. It is just "in your face" as we say. Your workbook says that being stuck in the failures of your past is unbelief in the sacrifice, death, resurrection, and total defeat of sin that Jesus endured.

Have you done stupid things? Yes.

Did you let Jesus down? Yes.

Did you even let yourself down? Yes.

Do you believe that Jesus has forgiven you? Yes or No?

Again: Do you believe that Jesus has forgiven you? Yes or No?

If you do, if you see the lengths and the depths Jesus went through in order to reach and rescue Peter, then know that Jesus has gone, is going, and will go just as far for you! He loves you that much! So, your past failures do not have a limiting hold on your future! Instead, Jesus invites you into a new future! **The freedom that God gives you is not only freedom from sin, but freedom to live with purpose.**

There's something really great that Jesus did that I want you to notice today. Jesus invites the disciples to come and eat. Eating together is an action that declared forgiveness and unity. Then Jesus has a conversation with Peter. The Bible tells us, ¹⁵ ***When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?"***

"These?" "Do you love me more than *these*?" "These" What's these? Was Jesus pointing to the other disciples there? "*Peter, do you love me more than these other guys do?*" Was there a comparison going on here with the other men?

No. The words here really point to the boat, the fishing net, the stuff of Pete's old life. Jesus is saying, "Do you love me more than your old, fishing, secure, safe, comfortable, predictable life?" He's calling Peter to follow Him again. To be restored.

And Jesus 3-times uses Pete's full name. "Simon son of Jonah." ***"Simon son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?"***

When is your full name used? When I was a kid, if my mother used my full name, "Paul Gregg Werner," that meant I was really in deep trouble. You probably had the same thing happen when your mother called your full name when you were little, right?

But there are other times your full name is used – more than getting in trouble as a child.

On your wedding day, full names come out.

On your graduation day, full names come out.

I remember, on my ordination into ministry, and as I stood here on the day I became your pastor, my full name was spoken, “Paul Gregg Werner,” and hands were placed on me, to commission me into a new beginning.

“Simon son of Jonah,” Jesus said. It’s a new beginning for him. God is calling him to a new future. It’s an inauguration – a stepping up.

Friend, hear Jesus calling your name today. It’s new beginning for you, leaving the past behind, a new future given by His grace.

See, there are two kinds of freedom, really. There is freedom FROM. That’s freedom from oppression, freedom from someone else telling you what to do. Freedom FROM is usually what we think of when we use the word “freedom.”

But there is another kind of freedom. A more important freedom. It’s freedom *FOR*. This is freedom used *for* helping others. It is freedom *FOR* living for Jesus, for sharing His love, for serving Him, and loving Him with joy and gratitude in your heart. This is what being restored to Jesus is. Freedom *FOR!* A new beginning, a new future, to live for Jesus your Savior.

Back almost 30 years ago, a lot of guys got a shot at a new beginning. It was Spring, 1995, and Major League Baseball was very, very different. All the players were on strike. The million-dollar arms were at home. The home-run-hitting bats were in the rack. Even the minor league players were on strike. But the owners were determined to start the season, so they threw open the gates to almost anybody who knew how to scoop a grounder or run out a bunt.

The games weren’t fancy. Line drives rarely reached the outfield. Pitchers threw the ball so slowly that the radar gun couldn’t clock them. The players huffed and puffed more than the “Little Engine that Could.”

But, my, oh my, did the players have fun! The diamond was full of guys who played the game for the love of the game. When the coach said “run,” they ran! When the coach needed a volunteer to shag flies, a dozen hands went up. They arrived before the park

was open. When it was time to go home, they stayed until the grounds crew ran them off. They thanked the attendants for washing their uniforms. They thanked the caterers for the food. They thanked the fans for paying the dollar to watch. They thanked the umpires at the end of games. The line of players willing to sign autographs was longer than the line of fans who wanted those autographs.

These guys didn't see themselves as a blessing to baseball. They saw baseball as a blessing to them.

What made these guys special was simple. They were living a life they didn't deserve. These guys didn't make it to the big leagues on skill; they made it on luck. They weren't picked because they were good; they were picked because they were willing. And they knew it! These guys were just happy to be on the team. They didn't even care that their names weren't stitched on the back of their jerseys.

Shouldn't we be like those players? You get to live a life you don't deserve. You aren't good enough to get picked, but there you are, suited up and ready to play. **God doesn't NEED you on His team, but HE SURE WANTS YOU!** That, my friend, is God restoring you!

Do you deserve Jesus to come after you and restore you, to give you a new future, a new beginning, a new life of joy and freedom to live for Him? No. But would we trade the privilege? Not for the world! Past is pardoned. Future is secure. God's grace has placed you on a Dream Team beyond imagination!

AMEN.