

Have you ever felt like you let somebody down? A spouse, a friend, a colleague? It is not the best feeling in the world, especially when you had boasted how they could, beyond a shadow of a doubt, depend on you. (I will never let you know!) **You said you could be trusted and you wouldn't let them down, but you did.**

To disappoint someone you love hurts, and to disappoint someone who loves you hurts even more.

Has this ever happened to you? I know the feeling, and it hurts and fills you with sadness and a heavy burden of guilt.

This is hard because you can't hide from yourself. You must look in the mirror every morning and lie down with your memories and feelings every night. You must go forth with your conscience every day **replaying over and over again how you disappointed and hurt someone that loved you.**

And what about when you are ready to seek forgiveness, but the other side is not ready for it or simply does not welcome reconciliation. What then?

If this describes you today, I want you to know that there is always healing for your soul with God—even if you are unable to make things right with some people. There is healing from the guilt and pain you may be carrying. It is the will of God to give us life and health by restoring us from our brokenness by God's grace. **Not because we deserve it or we can do anything to gain it, but because we are loved unconditionally.**

Today's scripture is about the story of a man that betrayed and abandoned Jesus when he had promised he would never forsake him. This is the story of the apostle Peter that after denying being a disciple and even knowing Jesus three times, Jesus came to him to bring him back to new life.

Listen, this is **John 21:15-17,**

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

This event is the third time Jesus visited his disciples after the resurrection. Here, the Bible describes the conversation Jesus had with Peter after having had breakfast with them.

After their meal, Jesus turned to Peter and confronted him with the painful question, **"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"**

This must have been a very challenging moment for Peter. I can see him full of doubts concerning where he now stood with his master and friend, fearing this day when Christ might say something like, **"Peter, why did you deny me?"** That is the confrontation Peter was dreadfully waiting for. He might have imagined that Jesus would have told him, **"I don't want to see you ever again. I will never be able to forgive you."**

But Jesus' goal was not to push the knife of guilt any deeper into Peter's heart. Instead, his goal was **to remove Peter's guilt, to perform deep soul-surgery, and effectively cut out the ache from Peter's heart.**

Why is this story so significant, and how can it help us find healing too? Let's do a summary of Peter's life to answer these questions.

Simon Peter was very loyal to Jesus. He impressed Jesus many times with his confidence: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." "You are the Christ!" But during the last supper, Jesus made a shocking prediction that disturbed him: "I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."

Upon hearing it, Peter was so sad and resisted, saying to Jesus: "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." When Jesus was arrested and all the other disciples ran away, he followed Jesus—although at a distance.

But at a critical moment when he was identified as one of Jesus' disciples by a servant girl and his very survival was in question, he instinctively tried to save himself (we can't blame for that). He flatly denied Jesus as his master three times. He even cursed himself while denying Jesus (Mark 14:71). And that night, Peter went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:62), for he had failed not only himself but the one that loved him.

But Jesus did not abandon Peter, nor did he asked him to do anything to earn God's love, favor, or forgiveness. In this story, instead, we see Jesus revealing and offering his unfailing love for Peter. Jesus' questions for Peter, "Do you love me?" had nothing to do with embarrassing, accusing, or condemning him **but with healing, restoring, and redeeming him.**

Peter told Jesus that he would die for him (Luke 22:31-34) but denies him three times instead (Luke 22:54-62). So, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him, and each time Peter responded, "yes." This is very important to note. Jesus knew that Peter loved him and was giving him the opportunity to profess and remember his love three times, just as he had denied Jesus three times.

What Jesus was doing here with each question is healing every Peter's denial and restoring him back to purpose and his identity by telling him, **"Feed my lambs, tend my sheep." Remember, you do love me, and I trust you.**

This story is significant to us because it teaches that God knows and understands our frailties and faults. And the wonderful thing is that despite this, **Jesus still loves us the same and is eager to give us back our purpose by reminding us who we are—just as he did with Peter.**

You may not have denied Jesus as Peter did, but if you are anything like me, I suspect there have been times you have failed to live out your faith and keep your love for others in the way you wanted or promised to. And, just like Peter, you may have thought everything was over. **But Jesus did not give up on Peter, and he does not give up on any of us either.**

Is there anything you are holding onto that you think is so wrong that even though you have heard over and over that God forgives you, you are not letting it go?

What is that experience and memory that seems unforgivable? **Whatever it is, God can handle it. God wants to handle it.**

Like Peter, we will fail—over and over. I am sure this wasn't the last time Peter messed up. But nothing you have done or will do in the future will ever be enough to stop God from loving you.

Jesus brought healing to Peter to save him from his guilt and shame, and God wants to do the same for you. **Remember, Jesus does not condemn; he saves.**

I know this is hard to accept or even believe because sometimes we are so ashamed of ourselves that we automatically feel or believe that Jesus is ashamed of us too. **But he is not.** He knew we would struggle; he knew we would make wrong choices and decisions; he knew we would go through rough phases, but **he still chooses us every time.**

My friends, the good news is that no matter how far we stray or how low we fall, we are always just one step away from a complete restoration. Jesus restored Peter by his grace, and Jesus can restore you too.

(And, if you were hurt by someone and you are struggling to forgive them because it is a really hard thing to do, I encourage you to pray about it so you might find healing in letting go of the pain and disappointment too. Just imagine the power you have in telling someone, "I forgive you." That is what Jesus has done to all of us, anyway.)

So, when we walk away, when we stumble and fall or we are hurt and disappointed Jesus holds his arms wide open, saying, "You can come to me, I will restore you and give you new life." Amen.