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 boasted how they could depend on you beyond a shadow of a doubt. (I will never let you know!) You said you could be trusted and wouldn’t let them down, but you did.

To disappoint someone you love hurts, but disappointing someone who loves you hurts even more.

So much is lost in broken relationships: family, friendships, jobs, etc. You lose yourself, those you care about, and the opportunity to have a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Today’s message is about healing broken relationships. If we care about living a good and meaningful life, this is critical learning we need.

The Scripture for this message is about the story of a man that struggled with deep sadness and guilt because he betrayed and abandoned his friend, Jesus, when he had promised he would never forsake him. His guilt pushed him away from those he cared about because he was so ashamed of himself for letting Jesus and his friends down. 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, John describes the conversation Jesus had with Peter after having had breakfast with them. After their meal, Jesus turned to Peter and asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Where is this question coming from? Simon Peter was very loyal to Jesus. He tried to impress 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 Peter: “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.” However, when Jesus was arrested, and all the other disciples ran away, Peter denied Jesus as his master three times. He even cursed himself while denying Jesus (Mark 14:71). Then, he wept bitterly (Luke 22:62), for he had failed not only himself but also the one that loved him.

So, when Jesus came asking him if he loved him, that was a harrowing 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 again. I will never be able to forgive you for what you did to me.” But that is not what happened. Instead, Jesus approached him to bring him back.

How so? 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. By asking him three times if he loved him, Jesus was helping him remember his love for him as if saying, “Don’t dwell in the pain of the past and your failures. Remember, you do love me, and I trust you. Look up ahead, now.”

Why is this so significant? Because Jesus is showing us how to mend broken relationships. He did not abandon Peter, nor did he ask him to do anything to earn his love, favor, or forgiveness. Instead, we see Jesus revealing and offering his unfailing love for Peter.

We can relate to this, don’t we? We deal with disappointment, sadness, and guilt in our relationships too. We, too, forget how much we care for others and how others care for us, and unless someone reminds us of that love, we could spend the rest of our lives missing out on all of it.

The tragedy of this is that if we live long enough with guilt and unforgiveness, we will miss the little things in life that make life worth living. Let me explain.

What’s the good life? What picture comes to mind? Perhaps laying down on a white-sand beach drinking lemonade, margaritas, or pina colada? That is a nice picture. But you are mistaken. As great as that may be, that is not the good life. The good life is having someone who thinks of you with love and misses you and can’t wait for you to get home. It is having a spouse who sends you out with a kiss each morning and welcomes you back the same way. It is having friends who get happy about your success or, without a second thought, will be there in your struggle. It is having your children honoring and looking after you because you are the most wonderful person in the world to them (emphasis on “to them.”)

The good life is not the bliss in the mundane but the relationships in our lives, how we treat and care for each other. The good life can’t happen without people. So, when we get our relationships right, that is when we experience the good life no matter what happens around us. We can struggle with all kinds of issues, but we will be fine if the right people are in our lives.

Do you see the point? The good life is made up of those small things that happen every day with the people we love and love us—the kisses, hugs, smiles, laughs, walks, conversations, meals, planning, dreaming, and so on. Those small things are the big, most important ones.

But all those “small things” can be lost in a moment. If there is unresolved conflict and unforgiveness in those relationships, we will miss all of it because we will shut down, stop talking, push each other away, and even cause hurt by saying things we don’t mean. No more kisses or welcoming smiles. Lost friendships. And all the projects and plans come crashing down.

That is the stuff that truly kills us from within, that dries up the blood in our hearts. And I think that is what was happening to Peter. He was drying up from the inside out for what he said and did. The life he thought he had, seemed to be long gone, unredeemable.

Do you know how that feels or what it looks like? Perhaps you do. 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. You said or did things you did not mean, yet they sounded and looked like you did. Regardless, the pain they caused was real.

How do we take that stuff back? How do we come back? Well, if we had a time machine, that would help. But we don’t. So, the solution is not pretending it did not happen, much less that the pain is not real, because all of it is. The way to change the past, so to speak, is by forgiving it. We can’t take the words and actions back, but they can be forgiven, healed, and even forgotten.

The apostle Paul talked about love as the most powerful gift we have. He said that love is the most powerful medicine for the heart, mind, and soul, as it says in 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8,

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”

We can make a lot of this; there is so much here. But the main idea is that love heals and keeps us healthy. It was love that Jesus used to mend Peter’s relationship with him and his friends. When Jesus restored Peter, he also brought him back to the others. What a gift!

Here is the good news, 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 with his grace, and Jesus can restore you and your relationships too.

You may have thought everything was over after you messed up your relationships. But it isn’t. I am not saying things can go back to the way they were because it is impossible, and sometimes people may not want to reconcile, but if you act in love, you can move on, and your future can be good.

So, we start with knowing that God’s will is to give us a good life by restoring us from our brokenness. Then, we carry through with everything else from that place of love and acceptance. Think of it as extending the love you experienced from God to others. The way you are loved and forgiven, you love and forgive others.

Today’s invitation is to try to live the good life by keeping your relationships healthy. You will not live forever, so do what is good today and stop messing around because it is not about how many years you get to live but how you lived them.