

The Future Disciple, Tim Keller

[00:00:00.790] - Speaker 2

Tonight's scripture reading is found in **John 13, verses 33 through 38.**

³³“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me. And just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now, where I am going, you cannot come. ³⁴A new command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” ³⁶Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” ³⁷Peter asked, “Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” ³⁸Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly. I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

The word of the Lord.

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As I think most of you know, this is the beginning of a story about Peter. It has three parts to it. Peter is here. Jesus is predicting that Peter is going to disown him publicly. He's going to deny him, that he ever knew Jesus publicly three times. So here in John 13, you have the prediction. Then in John 18, you have the account of how it happened. And then in John chapter 21, we have Jesus sitting down with Peter and restoring him. So, the fact is that this year we're going to go from John chapter 13 through 17. That's what we're covering. We'll never get to 18 or 21 this year, and therefore, I'm going to tell you the whole story. So even though we have just read this part, we will at least touch on the other parts. But here's what I want you to see. **Here is a guide to how you deal with failure.** How do you deal with failure? How do you deal with major epic failure and come out on the other side a greater person than you were before? That sounds practical, doesn't it? And so, let's take a look at first of all, the reasons for Peter's failure.

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There's two reasons. The way Jesus healed him, there are two ways. And then what Peter became. Okay. The reasons for his failure, the way that he was healed and what Peter became. So, let's start with the reasons for the failure. There's two. Now, setting this up, Jesus has just said, my children, I will be with you only a little longer. I'm going away. Now, from our vantage point, it's easy to see. It's the night before he's going to die. He's going to go to the cross. He's going to be executed. He's going to be put to death. And that's what he means. And he says, where I'm going, you can't come. Peter says, what are you talking about? Where are you going? Jesus doesn't actually elucidate, but he repeats, well, where I'm going, you can't come. That stings Peter's pride. And he says, wait a minute, wait a minute. Wherever you're going, even if it means to death, I will lay down my life for you. I will go with you. So, when we take a look at this statement, I will lay down my life for you, we see here two reasons why Peter did fail.

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One was the most obvious, is overconfidence. He says, absolutely, even if there's danger, I will never turn back. So, Peter said, I'm sure that if there were danger, I would have no problem being brave. He was overconfident. He didn't really know who he was. Overconfidence is very serious. It means you don't know who you are. You think you're somebody you're really not. Because we know that within hours, right? Within hours. Here, let me just recount what happens. You can read this in John 18. You can read this in Mark, chapter 14. You can read this in Luke, chapter 22. All the gospels talk about it. Jesus gets arrested, and he's taken to the high priest house for a trial. Peter follows along, trying to be careful not to be seen, and then decides to stay in the courtyard of the high priest's house where there's a fire and there are guards and soldiers warming themselves around the fire. Peter goes to the fire, but he's recognized. And when he's recognized, someone says, wait, you are with that guy. You are one of the followers of that guy that's been arrested and he's charged three times, weren't you one of his followers?

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And three times he says, no. And in Mark, chapter 13, 14, the last time, I mean, it's getting scary because, aren't you one of those? No. Aren't you with him? No. And then finally, the last time, surely you're with him. And the last time he says, I don't know him. And it says, he called down curses. That's in Mark 14, and it's a Greek verb that's a transitive, it's not a reflexive verb. And here's what that means. A reflexive verb would mean he called it down on himself, but he wasn't calling the curses down on himself, nor was he calling the curses down on anybody else around him. Who was he calling the curses down on? He must have been calling down the curses on Jesus as a way to prove that he couldn't be one of his followers because no follower would curse his master in public. That is an epic failure. That is bald faced cowardice. That is, I'm going to save my skin no matter what it takes. That is the most absolute lack of integrity. It's shameful. And yet here, a few hours before, Peter says, well, I'm sure that if my life are on the line, I'd be brave.

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So, he's overconfident. To be overconfident means you don't know who you are, and especially you don't know the depth of your capacities for dishonesty, cruelty and cowardice. And actually, I don't know hardly anybody who's not overconfident in this sense. We see other people being cowardly, cruel, or dishonest. We say, I wouldn't be that way. If my life was on the line I wouldn't do that. I would have integrity. I wouldn't do that sort of thing. Between the Upper Room discourse and the arrest, Jesus goes to the garden of Gethsemane with Peter and a couple other disciples to pray. And you remember what he says to Peter? He says, pray. I'm going to pray, but you need to pray lest ye enter into temptation. In other words, what Jesus is saying is, Peter, there's a test coming, and you're not ready for it. And you need to be asking God for help. You need to be calling out to God, God, help me. So, he goes off and he prays. He comes back and Peter's asleep. Why is he asleep? Because he doesn't think he's got a problem. Prayer is boring to Peter because he doesn't feel like he's got a need.

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He says, well, if there's a test coming, I'm up for it. Let me ask you something. This is just a little sidebar, actually. My wife calls it more of a drive by. Do you find prayer boring? If you're a professing Christian, do you find prayer boring? Do you find you're never getting to it? You're so busy, you're not really getting to it. The only possible reason for that is overconfidence. The only possible reason that you don't pray and pray a lot is because you don't know who you are. The only possible reason you don't pray is because you don't believe there are tests coming in your life and you are not up to them. You are absolutely not up to them. Prayer is not boring if you know who you are. So, kind of a drive by. Kathy said, that's more like a knife in the back. Okay, put it this way. I've been very convicted by this, and misery loves company. There's some advantage to being a preacher if you're getting convicted of sin. I can make hundreds of other people miserable with me. So here we are. No, I hope we're all helped by that, actually.

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But what's the second reason for Peter's failure? It's not just overconfidence. If you look carefully when he says, I will lay down my life for you, you all know that a sentence somewhat changes in its meaning depending on where you put the emphasis. Where's the emphasis? And what if he said, I will lay down my life for you? See, in Matthew chapter 26, we're told that when Jesus told Peter that he's going to fall away, he says, even if everyone else falls away, I will not. See what Peter is saying in Matthew 26? All these other people, they're not going to die for you, but I will. And we know this in John 21, in this gospel, when Peter, Peter betrays, denies Jesus three time at a fire. Jesus sits Peter down at a fire on a beach. In John 20, 21, after the resurrection, after the crucifixion, he sets Peter down on the beach and three times asks him if he loves, know, making him retrace and repent for his denial. But the first time he says, Peter, do you love me more than these? See what Jesus is saying. Peter, are you still saying you love me more than anyone else?

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That everyone else would fall away, everyone else would flee, but you would stay with me. See what Peter's got here, I'm going to give it a name, is a false identity. Here's what Peter is saying is. Jesus, I'm the most sold out of your disciples. I'm the most passionate of your disciples. None of the others would go into death for you, but I would. Peter is proud of his faithfulness. He's proud of his obedience. In fact, Peter is not getting his identity so much from Jesus' unmerited love to him. He's getting his identity from his great love for Jesus. Jesus is Peter's teacher. But Jesus is not Peter's savior. Peter is Peter's savior. His identity is not rooted in, oh, this unmerited love from Jesus Christ coming to me as a sinner, and therefore I don't merit it, and therefore it's absolutely certain, and I'm rooted in it. It humbles me I'm a sinner saved by grace. That's not his identity. That's the real Christian identity. He's got a false identity. That false identity is I'm a great person. I'm a religious person. I love Jesus. I'm sold out for Jesus. And that's why Jesus is going to bless me.

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I'm the best disciple there is. And it's because his identity is rooted in his performance, is rooted in his perceived love and faithfulness to Jesus. That's the reason for his overconfidence. See, if your identity is based on being brave, then you can't look in your heart and see any cowardice. It just can't be there. You just filter it out. You have to be in denial. Why? You see, if your identity is not in being brave, then you can see cowardice in your heart because, oh, well, I am cowardly. But if your identity is being brave, if that's really how you think of yourself, if that's the basis for your self-regard, the basis for your joy and your self-image, then you can't admit if you're cowardly and that's why you're out of touch. And by the way, this is true of any identity other than an identity rooted in Jesus' unmerited love. Some years ago, I talked to a chaplain of an elite boarding school. It was really elite. I mean, it was very hard to get into. And he said, boy, he says, the first year or so, the kids who come to this elite boarding school are just a wreck.

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They are just a wreck. And I said, they're having meltdowns and they're emotionally basket cases. I said, why? Well, he says, here's the point. Up until they get here, every one of these kids has been the smartest kid in the class. For year after year after year, these kids have been the smartest kid in the class. And after a while you start to say, well, who are you? Who are you? I'm the smartest kid in the class. What makes you feel good about yourself? Where's your self-regard based? I'm smart. I get straight A's. He says, the trouble is now they all come to the school and they're all in the same classroom and only one kid can be the smartest kid in that class. And the rest of them are melding down. Why? He says, well, they're angry at the professor or they're angry at the teacher saying, I can't get a B. That's not fair. Or they're angry at themselves and they're beating themselves up. He says, when your identity is, I'm the smartest kid in the class and you get into a class in which only one person can be, you either have to go get another identity or you just have meltdowns in which you're out of touch with reality.

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You can't admit it. You can't admit that, hey, maybe I'm not the smartest. You can't admit that. Maybe the teacher was fair when they gave me a B. You can't admit things. I can't. It has to be! See? And any identity besides rooted in anything other than the unmerited love of Christ, an identity that you achieve and then you have to live up to, it's always insecure, it always leads to denial, a lack of self-awareness, it leads, in Peter's case, it leads to over aggression. You know, when Jesus shows up, when Jesus, they come to arrest Jesus, Peter's the one that grabs the sword and cuts off the person's ear. Look, if I'm... We all have our identities, don't we? And our identities are multifaceted, right? So, for example, you've got a race, you've got a class, you've got a nationality, a culture, you've got a gender. Maybe you have your politics and these are all important parts of your identity. But if any of them is sort of the ultimate identity, if it's your main identity, then when you talk to somebody over on the other side who disagrees with you or opposes you, you're going to cut off their ear.

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You despise them. It's the same reason why if your identity is based on being brave, anybody even saying you're a coward, you're going to cut off their ear. I can't be. I mustn't be. But what if Christ is your basic identity and that doesn't eradicate your race? It doesn't eradicate it at all. It doesn't eradicate your class or your gender. What if your basic self-regard, your most fundamental self-regard, is based in Jesus' unmerited love? You know what that means? Means when you talk to people who are different than you in all those areas, you don't melt down when they oppose you, you don't grab your sword and cut off their ear. You don't fall apart when you don't do well, because your identity is not based on your performance. It's based on Christ's performance. You see how wild that would be? Do you see? If you had a Christian identity, you would be the kind of person this society needs right now, a society where people can talk to one another without cutting off each other's ears or worse. But Peter doesn't have it because Jesus is his teacher but not his savior. He's being his own savior.

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So, because of his overconfidence, because of his false identity, Peter fails. All right, then how does Jesus heal him? Well, there's two things Jesus does, and you don't find that in verse 37. You find it in verse 38. Now, absolutely. This is only the prediction. The awkwardness about this sermon is I'm constantly bringing in other texts that we're never going to get to this year, so I have to bring them in. So how does Jesus heal Peter? Well, you'd have to go to John, chapter 21, after Jesus goes to the cross, after he is raised from the dead, and he's sitting down and he's talking to Peter. And yet I think verse 38 tells us the two things that always have to happen if you're going to be healed after failure. So, will you please listen? Because you are going to fail. Some of you have had it lately and you haven't really recovered. You haven't been healed from it. Some of you are in the middle of it, and all of you will have these situations. How will you get through them? So, on the other side, you're not more broken. Well, here's the two things always.

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Number one, you got to repent. And number two, you have to have a new infusion of Christ's love. And that's the two things Jesus does. See, first of all, you got to repent. Look what he says. Then Jesus answered, let's look at the second of the two sentences. Very truly. I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times. You know, didn't I talk to you about this a couple weeks ago? When Jesus says, verily, verily or truly, truly? Depends on the translation. Here he says, very truly. When Jesus uses the two little Greek words amen, amen, which is, so be it, so be it. It's hard to translate when he says that before he speaks, he's saying, I'm about to tell you something of supreme importance and absolute certainty. So, here's Peter saying, I would die for you. Here's what Jesus says. Within hours before the cock crows. The cock crows. Usually, the rooster would crow in that time, somewhere between midnight and 03:00 a.m. Before the cock crows, you won't just disown me once. See, this is an amazing statement, Peter. You're not only going to fall down once. Very often, surely this happens to you,

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somebody surprises you and you say something and you're really kind of disappointed in yourself and you say, gee, I wish I had a second chance. Well, Peter has three chances. So, the first time he says something very cowardly, but the second time he says something cowardly, the third time he says something worse. So, here's what Jesus is saying, "Peter, let me just tell you something. You just say you're the best disciple." "Absolutely!" "You're a coward, you're a threefold coward. You are cowardly all the way down. You are no way able to follow me. You're no able to do anything that I'm doing. You're a wreck and you're going to see you're a wreck within hours." This is hard. What Jesus is saying is the very first thing you have to do after, you see, when you, you have to repent without excuse, without minimizing, without blame shifting, without self-pity. But there's all kinds of ways of saying, well, I guess I'm sorry, but she made me do it. I mean there's all kinds of ways of looking like you're saying you're sorry but you're not repenting. The first step of getting through a failure and healing is you have to no excuse repent.

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Look, AA or twelve step, every twelve-step program, what's the first step? A lot of you know, don't you? We are powerless over our problems. That's the first step. You know what that is? That's repentance. See, our culture says you've got what it takes, you can handle it. No, the people who know, the people who go through twelve steps, the people who've actually been out there in life, here's what they know. The number one first step about getting through first step of healing after a failure is what? I don't have what it takes. I am powerless over my problems. I'm helpless. I don't have the resources in myself. I'm going to have to look outside of myself. That's repentance. And so, the first step is always very tough. It's repentance. But here's the second step. Only when you're down, only when you've finally repented, which means only when you stopped basing your identity in something else and admitted what you've done, can you let the suffering and the hurt drive you like a nail, drive you more deeply into the love of Jesus Christ because now where does he do that? Well, obviously after the cross, after the resurrection, Jesus is able to sit down and point to the cross and he gets it.

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But even here, look what he's saying. Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me?" Now, what kind of question is that? Some people say he's mocking him. You think you're going to lay down your life for me? I doubt it. That's not Jesus' tone. Virtually never is. It's ironic, but it's pointing to something wonderful. What is it? Look, when Jesus says, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Do you realize what night it is? Do you realize what's going to happen tomorrow, Peter? Here you're talking about laying down your life. I think what Jesus is saying is, Peter, do you really think that you will lay down your life for me and that will save the day? No, I'm about to lay down my life for you and that will save the day and will save you and will save the world. In another way Jesus is saying, Peter, lay down the melancholy burden of self-salvation, basing your identity on your love for me and your faithfulness and your sold outness. Oh, my goodness, what a burden. You have to keep that up. You have to constantly wamp up every day new enthusiasm, and you can't admit if there's anything wrong or if you ever have.

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If you're flagging in zeal, it's all based on you. It's all about you. No wonder you're tired. Lay down the melancholy burden of thinking that you earn my blessing by sacrificing for me. You don't. I earn your eternal life by my sacrificing for you. Lay down the burden of self-salvation and rest in my love. I think that's the irony. Are you really think you're going to die for me? Oh, no. Don't you understand? Peter, relax. I'm going to die for you. And that leads to this. Look at what verse 36 says. You go by pretty quickly. In fact, I often went by it. But see, Simon Peter does not know what he's asking for when he says, where are you going? And Jesus says, where I'm going, you can't follow. And he says, what are you talking about? And Jesus replies in verse 36, where I'm going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later. Isn't that something? Even though Peter doesn't know what he's talking about, he says, right now I'm going to go die for you. And you are in no way able to die for me because your religiosity has been about you, not about me.

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All of your religion all of your busyness, all the stuff that you thought was Christianity was really all about you. And as a result, you're self-absorbed, you're proud. And as a result, when push comes to shove and it looks like it's going to cost you something, you're going to collapse. So, there's no way that right now you can die for me. I'm going to have to die for you. But someday you will. And, you know, here's reasons why. We know a couple things. One is from history. We know there's all kinds of historical accounts that say that Peter was crucified along with many, many, many other Christians in Rome under Nero. One of the first big persecutions. About 30 years or so after Jesus died, there was another persecution, and Peter was there. And this time he didn't run, he didn't deny, and he died. And therefore, in one sense, Jesus is saying, you will follow me. But it's also a way of saying that this failure is actually going to make you in the person you think you are now, but you're not. See, there's the great irony when every time Jesus says to Peter at the fire in John chapter 21, every time he says, Peter, do you love me?

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And Peter says, I love you. And then he says, feed my sheep. The second time he says, take care of my sheep. Third time I think he says, feed my lambs. And Peter, Jesus is using words like *poimaínō*, which means to shepherd or pastor. See, Jesus is not saying, since you have failed but repented, I'll let you back into church. He's not just saying that. He says, because you failed and repented, now you can be the leader of the church. Jesus lived at a time in which every culture was a shame and honor culture. And in a shame and honor culture, leaders are strong, and the people in authority must be strong and they must be feared. And in those cultures, it was thought that unless the people in authority were strong and feared, society would fall apart. And at that time, there wasn't a human organization on the face of the earth that would have let someone like Peter break his promises, curse his master publicly, dishonor himself like that, and then come back in after repentance and lead the whole organization. Nobody would have ever. There's not a place on the face of the earth that would have allowed that.

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But see, Christianity has a completely different understanding of greatness. Do you? Paul puts it like this. When I'm weak, then I'm strong. His power is made perfect in weakness. Every other religion says, if you want to be saved, be strong and live a good life, and then maybe you can attain it. But only Christianity says, if you want my salvation, you have to be weak, you have to repent, you have to admit that you're a sinner, you have to admit you're spiritually bankrupt. You have to wholly rely on Jesus Christ. In other words, the way to become strong in Christianity is become weak. And therefore, here's what Jesus is saying to Peter. Peter, now that you're really weak, you were always too strong to be a great disciple. You're always too full of yourself, you're always too unbroken. But now you've become weak. You've become so weak, you've become helpless. And now your failure, plunged into my grace, will make you the best leader, the best disciple. Who can speak into people's lives better than someone who finally knows their own heart? Who can lead better than someone who's both humbled by the grace of God and yet at the same time affirmed? Because now your identity is based on something you can't lose. Only love of the immutable will bring tranquility. Only love of the immutable will bring tranquility. If you love your family, you can lose your family. If you love your own virtue, if you love your own morality, that can fail you. In other words, if you love anything except God himself, or if you base your identity on anything other than the unmerited love of God, you're up and down and up and down. You're going to lose it. What if you've got the stability of a Christian identity? And the way that that Christian identity grows, unfortunately, I wish I didn't have to say it. Generally speaking, the liberating knowledge that I am in Christ and loved by him, the Christian identity is so liberating. But almost the only way to get through it is through failure. Because only through failure do we finally pull our fingers off of these other things we identify with and really rest in Christ. But Paul, here's what Jesus is saying, you know, Peter failed Jesus like this, Paul killed Christians, these are the kind of people that Paul, Jesus says, "You're my chief disciples, you're my chief leaders." Why? Because you're a wreck. Because you've been in the gutter. Because you've always been down at the very bottom. And now if instead of letting that failure drive you away from me, but toward me now, you can be the greatest. If you failed recently in some way, Jesus Christ says to you, you are exactly the kind of material I like to make my chief disciples and leaders out of. That should give you hope. But make sure you realize, see, if your identity is based in your performance, then when you get near Jesus Christ, you're going to want to run away. But if your identity has started to become based in his love, then when you fail, you're going to run right toward him. In Luke, chapter five, when Peter's in the boat and all the fish, the miraculous catch a fish, remember that. And Peter realizes that Jesus is not just a man, but God. He says, depart from me, for I'm a sinful man. Peter doesn't like being thought. He doesn't like feeling weak. He doesn't like feeling sinful, and none of us do. And when you get near God feeling weak and sinful, one of the ways to deal with that feeling is to get away. Just don't run away from God. Don't believe in God. Don't have anything to do with him. But in John, chapter 21, Peter has begun to get healed because he's also in a boat. And there's a miraculous catch of fish. And he realized that Jesus is on the beach. And this time, instead of saying, depart from me, Peter wraps his wrap around himself and runs. Jumps out of the boat and runs as fast as he possibly can to Jesus. Why? Because he's got a new identity. Now you get that identity so that every time you fail, you run to

him and you fall more deeply into his arms. And you base your life more in his love than ever. And you'll become greater and greater as you plunge your failures into his grace.

Let's pray. Our Father, thank you for giving us the hope that no matter what we have done, no matter how great our failures, they not only can be healed and forgiven, but they can actually become the way in which we become more useful to you and more useful in the lives of others than ever before. We thank you for that. We ask that those of us who especially are facing times like this, that you would heal us through repentance and a new infusion of your love and a reorientation of our identity toward your Son, Jesus Christ. It's in his name we pray. Amen.

The Future Disciple, Tim Keller

[00:00:00.790] - Speaker 2

Tonight's scripture reading is found in **John 13, verses 33 through 38.**

³³“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me. And just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now, where I am going, you cannot come. ³⁴A new command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” ³⁶Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” ³⁷Peter asked, “Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” ³⁸Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly. I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

The word of the Lord.

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As I think most of you know, this is the beginning of a story about Peter. It has three parts to it. Peter is here. Jesus is predicting that Peter is going to disown him publicly. He's going to deny him, that he ever knew Jesus publicly three times. So here in John 13, you have the prediction. Then in John 18, you have the account of how it happened. And then in John chapter 21, we have Jesus sitting down with Peter and restoring him. So, the fact is that this year we're going to go from John chapter 13 through 17. That's what we're covering. We'll never get to 18 or 21 this year, and therefore, I'm going to tell you the whole story. So even though we have just read this part, we will at least touch on the other parts. But here's what I want you to see. **Here is a guide to how you deal with failure.** How do you deal with failure? How do you deal with major epic failure and come out on the other side a greater person than you were before? That sounds practical, doesn't it? And so, let's take a look at first of all, the reasons for Peter's failure.

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There's two reasons. The way Jesus healed him, there are two ways. And then what Peter became. Okay. The reasons for his failure, the way that he was healed and what Peter became. So, let's start with the reasons for the failure. There's two. Now, setting this up, Jesus has just said, my children, I will be with you only a little longer. I'm going away. Now, from our vantage point, it's easy to see. It's the night before he's going to die. He's going to go to the cross. He's going to be executed. He's going to be put to death. And that's what he means. And he says, where I'm going, you can't come. Peter says, what are you talking about? Where are you going? Jesus doesn't actually elucidate, but he repeats, well, where I'm going, you can't come. That stings Peter's pride. And he says, wait a minute, wait a minute. Wherever you're going, even if it means to death, I will lay down my life for you. I will go with you. So, when we take a look at this statement, I will lay down my life for you, we see here two reasons why Peter did fail.

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One was the most obvious, is overconfidence. He says, absolutely, even if there's danger, I will never turn back. So, Peter said, I'm sure that if there were danger, I would have no problem being brave. He was overconfident. He didn't really know who he was. Overconfidence is very serious. It means you don't know who you are. You think you're somebody you're really not. Because we know that within hours, right? Within hours. Here, let me just recount what happens. You can read this in John 18. You can read this in Mark, chapter 14. You can read this in Luke, chapter 22. All the gospels talk about it. Jesus gets arrested, and he's taken to the high priest house for a trial. Peter follows along, trying to be careful not to be seen, and then decides to stay in the courtyard of the high priest's house where there's a fire and there are guards and soldiers warming themselves around the fire. Peter goes to the fire, but he's recognized. And when he's recognized, someone says, wait, you are with that guy. You are one of the followers of that guy that's been arrested and he's charged three times, weren't you one of his followers?

[00:05:09.530] - Speaker 1

And three times he says, no. And in Mark, chapter 13, 14, the last time, I mean, it's getting scary because, aren't you one of those? No. Aren't you with him? No. And then finally, the last time, surely you're with him. And the last time he says, I don't know him. And it says, he called down curses. That's in Mark 14, and it's a Greek verb that's a transitive, it's not a reflexive verb. And here's what that means. A reflexive verb would mean he called it down on himself, but he wasn't calling the curses down on himself, nor was he calling the curses down on anybody else around him. Who was he calling the curses down on? He must have been calling down the curses on Jesus as a way to prove that he couldn't be one of his followers because no follower would curse his master in public. That is an epic failure. That is bald faced cowardice. That is, I'm going to save my skin no matter what it takes. That is the most absolute lack of integrity. It's shameful. And yet here, a few hours before, Peter says, well, I'm sure that if my life are on the line, I'd be brave.

[00:06:25.680] - Speaker 1

So, he's overconfident. To be overconfident means you don't know who you are, and especially you don't know the depth of your capacities for dishonesty, cruelty and cowardice. And actually, I don't know hardly anybody who's not overconfident in this sense. We see other people being cowardly, cruel, or dishonest. We say, I wouldn't be that way. If my life was on the line I wouldn't do that. I would have integrity. I wouldn't do that sort of thing. Between the Upper Room discourse and the arrest, Jesus goes to the garden of Gethsemane with Peter and a couple other disciples to pray. And you remember what he says to Peter? He says, pray. I'm going to pray, but you need to pray lest ye enter into temptation. In other words, what Jesus is saying is, Peter, there's a test coming, and you're not ready for it. And you need to be asking God for help. You need to be calling out to God, God, help me. So, he goes off and he prays. He comes back and Peter's asleep. Why is he asleep? Because he doesn't think he's got a problem. Prayer is boring to Peter because he doesn't feel like he's got a need.

[00:07:40.120] - Speaker 1

He says, well, if there's a test coming, I'm up for it. Let me ask you something. This is just a little sidebar, actually. My wife calls it more of a drive by. Do you find prayer boring? If you're a professing Christian, do you find prayer boring? Do you find you're never getting to it? You're so busy, you're not really getting to it. The only possible reason for that is overconfidence. The only possible reason that you don't pray and pray a lot is because you don't know who you are. The only possible reason you don't pray is because you don't believe there are tests coming in your life and you are not up to them. You are absolutely not up to them. Prayer is not boring if you know who you are. So, kind of a drive by. Kathy said, that's more like a knife in the back. Okay, put it this way. I've been very convicted by this, and misery loves company. There's some advantage to being a preacher if you're getting convicted of sin. I can make hundreds of other people miserable with me. So here we are. No, I hope we're all helped by that, actually.

[00:08:47.850] - Speaker 1

But what's the second reason for Peter's failure? It's not just overconfidence. If you look carefully when he says, I will lay down my life for you, you all know that a sentence somewhat changes in its meaning depending on where you put the emphasis. Where's the emphasis? And what if he said, I will lay down my life for you? See, in Matthew chapter 26, we're told that when Jesus told Peter that he's going to fall away, he says, even if everyone else falls away, I will not. See what Peter is saying in Matthew 26? All these other people, they're not going to die for you, but I will. And we know this in John 21, in this gospel, when Peter, Peter betrays, denies Jesus three time at a fire. Jesus sits Peter down at a fire on a beach. In John 20, 21, after the resurrection, after the crucifixion, he sets Peter down on the beach and three times asks him if he loves, know, making him retrace and repent for his denial. But the first time he says, Peter, do you love me more than these? See what Jesus is saying. Peter, are you still saying you love me more than anyone else?

[00:10:12.630] - Speaker 1

That everyone else would fall away, everyone else would flee, but you would stay with me. See what Peter's got here, I'm going to give it a name, is a false identity. Here's what Peter is saying is. Jesus, I'm the most sold out of your disciples. I'm the most passionate of your disciples. None of the others would go into death for you, but I would. Peter is proud of his faithfulness. He's proud of his obedience. In fact, Peter is not getting his identity so much from Jesus' unmerited love to him. He's getting his identity from his great love for Jesus. Jesus is Peter's teacher. But Jesus is not Peter's savior. Peter is Peter's savior. His identity is not rooted in, oh, this unmerited love from Jesus Christ coming to me as a sinner, and therefore I don't merit it, and therefore it's absolutely certain, and I'm rooted in it. It humbles me I'm a sinner saved by grace. That's not his identity. That's the real Christian identity. He's got a false identity. That false identity is I'm a great person. I'm a religious person. I love Jesus. I'm sold out for Jesus. And that's why Jesus is going to bless me.

[00:11:27.200] - Speaker 1

I'm the best disciple there is. And it's because his identity is rooted in his performance, is rooted in his perceived love and faithfulness to Jesus. That's the reason for his overconfidence. See, if your identity is based on being brave, then you can't look in your heart and see any cowardice. It just can't be there. You just filter it out. You have to be in denial. Why? You see, if your identity is not in being brave, then you can see cowardice in your heart because, oh, well, I am cowardly. But if your identity is being brave, if that's really how you think of yourself, if that's the basis for your self-regard, the basis for your joy and your self-image, then you can't admit if you're cowardly and that's why you're out of touch. And by the way, this is true of any identity other than an identity rooted in Jesus' unmerited love. Some years ago, I talked to a chaplain of an elite boarding school. It was really elite. I mean, it was very hard to get into. And he said, boy, he says, the first year or so, the kids who come to this elite boarding school are just a wreck.

[00:12:36.050] - Speaker 1

They are just a wreck. And I said, they're having meltdowns and they're emotionally basket cases. I said, why? Well, he says, here's the point. Up until they get here, every one of these kids has been the smartest kid in the class. For year after year after year, these kids have been the smartest kid in the class. And after a while you start to say, well, who are you? Who are you? I'm the smartest kid in the class. What makes you feel good about yourself? Where's your self-regard based? I'm smart. I get straight A's. He says, the trouble is now they all come to the school and they're all in the same classroom and only one kid can be the smartest kid in that class. And the rest of them are melding down. Why? He says, well, they're angry at the professor or they're angry at the teacher saying, I can't get a B. That's not fair. Or they're angry at themselves and they're beating themselves up. He says, when your identity is, I'm the smartest kid in the class and you get into a class in which only one person can be, you either have to go get another identity or you just have meltdowns in which you're out of touch with reality.

[00:13:36.750] - Speaker 1

You can't admit it. You can't admit that, hey, maybe I'm not the smartest. You can't admit that. Maybe the teacher was fair when they gave me a B. You can't admit things. I can't. It has to be! See? And any identity besides rooted in anything other than the unmerited love of Christ, an identity that you achieve and then you have to live up to, it's always insecure, it always leads to denial, a lack of self-awareness, it leads, in Peter's case, it leads to over aggression. You know, when Jesus shows up, when Jesus, they come to arrest Jesus, Peter's the one that grabs the sword and cuts off the person's ear. Look, if I'm... We all have our identities, don't we? And our identities are multifaceted, right? So, for example, you've got a race, you've got a class, you've got a nationality, a culture, you've got a gender. Maybe you have your politics and these are all important parts of your identity. But if any of them is sort of the ultimate identity, if it's your main identity, then when you talk to somebody over on the other side who disagrees with you or opposes you, you're going to cut off their ear.

[00:14:51.630] - Speaker 1

You despise them. It's the same reason why if your identity is based on being brave, anybody even saying you're a coward, you're going to cut off their ear. I can't be. I mustn't be. But what if Christ is your basic identity and that doesn't eradicate your race? It doesn't eradicate it at all. It doesn't eradicate your class or your gender. What if your basic self-regard, your most fundamental self-regard, is based in Jesus' unmerited love? You know what that means? Means when you talk to people who are different than you in all those areas, you don't melt down when they oppose you, you don't grab your sword and cut off their ear. You don't fall apart when you don't do well, because your identity is not based on your performance. It's based on Christ's performance. You see how wild that would be? Do you see? If you had a Christian identity, you would be the kind of person this society needs right now, a society where people can talk to one another without cutting off each other's ears or worse. But Peter doesn't have it because Jesus is his teacher but not his savior. He's being his own savior.

[00:15:59.970] - Speaker 1

So, because of his overconfidence, because of his false identity, Peter fails. All right, then how does Jesus heal him? Well, there's two things Jesus does, and you don't find that in verse 37. You find it in verse 38. Now, absolutely. This is only the prediction. The awkwardness about this sermon is I'm constantly bringing in other texts that we're never going to get to this year, so I have to bring them in. So how does Jesus heal Peter? Well, you'd have to go to John, chapter 21, after Jesus goes to the cross, after he is raised from the dead, and he's sitting down and he's talking to Peter. And yet I think verse 38 tells us the two things that always have to happen if you're going to be healed after failure. So, will you please listen? Because you are going to fail. Some of you have had it lately and you haven't really recovered. You haven't been healed from it. Some of you are in the middle of it, and all of you will have these situations. How will you get through them? So, on the other side, you're not more broken. Well, here's the two things always.

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Number one, you got to repent. And number two, you have to have a new infusion of Christ's love. And that's the two things Jesus does. See, first of all, you got to repent. Look what he says. Then Jesus answered, let's look at the second of the two sentences. Very truly. I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times. You know, didn't I talk to you about this a couple weeks ago? When Jesus says, verily, verily or truly, truly? Depends on the translation. Here he says, very truly. When Jesus uses the two little Greek words amen, amen, which is, so be it, so be it. It's hard to translate when he says that before he speaks, he's saying, I'm about to tell you something of supreme importance and absolute certainty. So, here's Peter saying, I would die for you. Here's what Jesus says. Within hours before the cock crows. The cock crows. Usually, the rooster would crow in that time, somewhere between midnight and 03:00 a.m. Before the cock crows, you won't just disown me once. See, this is an amazing statement, Peter. You're not only going to fall down once. Very often, surely this happens to you,

[00:18:16.770] - Speaker 1

somebody surprises you and you say something and you're really kind of disappointed in yourself and you say, gee, I wish I had a second chance. Well, Peter has three chances. So, the first time he says something very cowardly, but the second time he says something cowardly, the third time he says something worse. So, here's what Jesus is saying, "Peter, let me just tell you something. You just say you're the best disciple." "Absolutely!" "You're a coward, you're a threefold coward. You are cowardly all the way down. You are no way able to follow me. You're no able to do anything that I'm doing. You're a wreck and you're going to see you're a wreck within hours." This is hard. What Jesus is saying is the very first thing you have to do after, you see, when you, you have to repent without excuse, without minimizing, without blame shifting, without self-pity. But there's all kinds of ways of saying, well, I guess I'm sorry, but she made me do it. I mean there's all kinds of ways of looking like you're saying you're sorry but you're not repenting. The first step of getting through a failure and healing is you have to no excuse repent.

[00:19:37.130] - Speaker 1

Look, AA or twelve step, every twelve-step program, what's the first step? A lot of you know, don't you? We are powerless over our problems. That's the first step. You know what that is? That's repentance. See, our culture says you've got what it takes, you can handle it. No, the people who know, the people who go through twelve steps, the people who've actually been out there in life, here's what they know. The number one first step about getting through first step of healing after a failure is what? I don't have what it takes. I am powerless over my problems. I'm helpless. I don't have the resources in myself. I'm going to have to look outside of myself. That's repentance. And so, the first step is always very tough. It's repentance. But here's the second step. Only when you're down, only when you've finally repented, which means only when you stopped basing your identity in something else and admitted what you've done, can you let the suffering and the hurt drive you like a nail, drive you more deeply into the love of Jesus Christ because now where does he do that? Well, obviously after the cross, after the resurrection, Jesus is able to sit down and point to the cross and he gets it.

[00:20:58.470] - Speaker 1

But even here, look what he's saying. Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me?" Now, what kind of question is that? Some people say he's mocking him. You think you're going to lay down your life for me? I doubt it. That's not Jesus' tone. Virtually never is. It's ironic, but it's pointing to something wonderful. What is it? Look, when Jesus says, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Do you realize what night it is? Do you realize what's going to happen tomorrow, Peter? Here you're talking about laying down your life. I think what Jesus is saying is, Peter, do you really think that you will lay down your life for me and that will save the day? No, I'm about to lay down my life for you and that will save the day and will save you and will save the world. In another way Jesus is saying, Peter, lay down the melancholy burden of self-salvation, basing your identity on your love for me and your faithfulness and your sold outness. Oh, my goodness, what a burden. You have to keep that up. You have to constantly wamp up every day new enthusiasm, and you can't admit if there's anything wrong or if you ever have.

[00:22:15.960] - Speaker 1

If you're flagging in zeal, it's all based on you. It's all about you. No wonder you're tired. Lay down the melancholy burden of thinking that you earn my blessing by sacrificing for me. You don't. I earn your eternal life by my sacrificing for you. Lay down the burden of self-salvation and rest in my love. I think that's the irony. Are you really think you're going to die for me? Oh, no. Don't you understand? Peter, relax. I'm going to die for you. And that leads to this. Look at what verse 36 says. You go by pretty quickly. In fact, I often went by it. But see, Simon Peter does not know what he's asking for when he says, where are you going? And Jesus says, where I'm going, you can't follow. And he says, what are you talking about? And Jesus replies in verse 36, where I'm going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later. Isn't that something? Even though Peter doesn't know what he's talking about, he says, right now I'm going to go die for you. And you are in no way able to die for me because your religiosity has been about you, not about me.

[00:23:35.320] - Speaker 1

All of your religion all of your busyness, all the stuff that you thought was Christianity was really all about you. And as a result, you're self-absorbed, you're proud. And as a result, when push comes to shove and it looks like it's going to cost you something, you're going to collapse. So, there's no way that right now you can die for me. I'm going to have to die for you. But someday you will. And, you know, here's reasons why. We know a couple things. One is from history. We know there's all kinds of historical accounts that say that Peter was crucified along with many, many, many other Christians in Rome under Nero. One of the first big persecutions. About 30 years or so after Jesus died, there was another persecution, and Peter was there. And this time he didn't run, he didn't deny, and he died. And therefore, in one sense, Jesus is saying, you will follow me. But it's also a way of saying that this failure is actually going to make you in the person you think you are now, but you're not. See, there's the great irony when every time Jesus says to Peter at the fire in John chapter 21, every time he says, Peter, do you love me?

[00:24:59.330] - Speaker 1

And Peter says, I love you. And then he says, feed my sheep. The second time he says, take care of my sheep. Third time I think he says, feed my lambs. And Peter, Jesus is using words like *poimaínō*, which means to shepherd or pastor. See, Jesus is not saying, since you have failed but repented, I'll let you back into church. He's not just saying that. He says, because you failed and repented, now you can be the leader of the church. Jesus lived at a time in which every culture was a shame and honor culture. And in a shame and honor culture, leaders are strong, and the people in authority must be strong and they must be feared. And in those cultures, it was thought that unless the people in authority were strong and feared, society would fall apart. And at that time, there wasn't a human organization on the face of the earth that would have let someone like Peter break his promises, curse his master publicly, dishonor himself like that, and then come back in after repentance and lead the whole organization. Nobody would have ever. There's not a place on the face of the earth that would have allowed that.

[00:26:09.720] - Speaker 1

But see, Christianity has a completely different understanding of greatness. Do you? Paul puts it like this. When I'm weak, then I'm strong. His power is made perfect in weakness. Every other religion says, if you want to be saved, be strong and live a good life, and then maybe you can attain it. But only Christianity says, if you want my salvation, you have to be weak, you have to repent, you have to admit that you're a sinner, you have to admit you're spiritually bankrupt. You have to wholly rely on Jesus Christ. In other words, the way to become strong in Christianity is become weak. And therefore, here's what Jesus is saying to Peter. Peter, now that you're really weak, you were always too strong to be a great disciple. You're always too full of yourself, you're always too unbroken. But now you've become weak. You've become so weak, you've become helpless. And now your failure, plunged into my grace, will make you the best leader, the best disciple. Who can speak into people's lives better than someone who finally knows their own heart? Who can lead better than someone who's both humbled by the grace of God and yet at the same time affirmed? Because now your identity is based on something you can't lose. Only love of the immutable will bring tranquility. Only love of the immutable will bring tranquility. If you love your family, you can lose your family. If you love your own virtue, if you love your own morality, that can fail you. In other words, if you love anything except God himself, or if you base your identity on anything other than the unmerited love of God, you're up and down and up and down. You're going to lose it. What if you've got the stability of a Christian identity? And the way that that Christian identity grows, unfortunately, I wish I didn't have to say it. Generally speaking, the liberating knowledge that I am in Christ and loved by him, the Christian identity is so liberating. But almost the only way to get through it is through failure. Because only through failure do we finally pull our fingers off of these other things we identify with and really rest in Christ. But Paul, here's what Jesus is saying, you know, Peter failed Jesus like this, Paul killed Christians, these are the kind of people that Paul, Jesus says, "You're my chief disciples, you're my chief leaders." Why? Because you're a wreck. Because you've been in the gutter. Because you've always been down at the very bottom. And now if instead of letting that failure drive you away from me, but toward me now, you can be the greatest. If you failed recently in some way, Jesus Christ says to you, you are exactly the kind of material I like to make my chief disciples and leaders out of. That should give you hope. But make sure you realize, see, if your identity is based in your performance, then when you get near Jesus Christ, you're going to want to run away. But if your identity has started to become based in his love, then when you fail, you're going to run right toward him. In Luke, chapter five, when Peter's in the boat and all the fish, the miraculous catch a fish, remember that. And Peter realizes that Jesus is not just a man, but God. He says, depart from me, for I'm a sinful man. Peter doesn't like being thought. He doesn't like feeling weak. He doesn't like feeling sinful, and none of us do. And when you get near God feeling weak and sinful, one of the ways to deal with that feeling is to get away. Just don't run away from God. Don't believe in God. Don't have anything to do with him. But in John, chapter 21, Peter has begun to get healed because he's also in a boat. And there's a miraculous catch of fish. And he realized that Jesus is on the beach. And this time, instead of saying, depart from me, Peter wraps his wrap around himself and runs. Jumps out of the boat and runs as fast as he possibly can to Jesus. Why? Because he's got a new identity. Now you get that identity so that every time you fail, you run to

him and you fall more deeply into his arms. And you base your life more in his love than ever. And you'll become greater and greater as you plunge your failures into his grace.

Let's pray. Our Father, thank you for giving us the hope that no matter what we have done, no matter how great our failures, they not only can be healed and forgiven, but they can actually become the way in which we become more useful to you and more useful in the lives of others than ever before. We thank you for that. We ask that those of us who especially are facing times like this, that you would heal us through repentance and a new infusion of your love and a reorientation of our identity toward your Son, Jesus Christ. It's in his name we pray. Amen.