

SERIES: THE DAY OF MERCY
PART 3: GOD'S MERCY FOR MY FAILURES

Welcome to week three of THE DAY OF MERCY. Please take out your teaching notes in your bulletin. Because we're imperfect people and we live in an imperfect world, we all experience failures in life. The night that Jesus Christ was arrested, before He went to the cross, two of His best friends had massive failures. Judas had the failure of betrayal. And Peter had the failure of denying Him. They both committed the same sin against Jesus; they both denied Christ. But they are different expressions of this sinful response. Judas rejected the mercy of God and later went out and hung himself. He committed suicide. Peter denied Jesus but then accepted God's mercy and later went out and became the leader of the N.T church.

Today, I want to look with you at God's mercy and your failures. We will learn from Peter's life some lessons on how to respond to God when we have small, and massive, failures. We will learn these lessons from Peter by asking three questions. We all know the best way to learn and to help people discover God's truth for themselves is to ask questions. The first question we will ask is, **"What causes personal failures in your life?"** We will look at Peter's failures and the three most common causes of failure in your life--financial, business, marriage, relational failure and other areas of failure that are caused primarily by three things. The 2nd question we will ask is, **"What did Peter do right after his failure?"** How do you recover after failure, and what does God want you to do when you fail? Third question: **"How does Jesus respond to our failures?"**

Let's look at Point I.

I. What causes our personal failures?

Three things Peter did wrong:

A. We overestimate our strengths

This is a huge cause of failure in your life and mine. When you think that you're

stronger than you really are and you think you can handle more than you really can. Jesus has just had the last supper with His disciples, and He tells them what is about to happen to Him and to them. The story begins in Matthew 26:31-35.

“31 On the way, Jesus told them, ‘Tonight all of you will desert Me. For the scriptures say, “God will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.” 32 But after I have been raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there.’ 33 Peter declared, ‘Even if everyone else deserts You, I will never desert You.’ 34 Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, Peter--this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know Me.’ 35 ‘No!’ Peter insisted. ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will never deny You!’ And all the other disciples vowed the same.”

Peter told Jesus two times that he would never deny Him. The other disciples said the same thing. This is overestimating our strengths. Businesses fail, battles are lost, students flunk out of school, spouses have affairs--all simply because they overestimated their strengths. “I can handle this. It’s just a little harmless office flirt. There’s nothing going to happen from it. I can handle this.” We must beware of thinking that says this could never happen to me. In 1 Corinthians, Paul says in the context of being tempted, “If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.” The Bible informs us that one of the reasons we have so many failures is because we think we’re stronger than we really are. Don’t be naïve. Don’t be so self-confident and self-sufficient. None of us are exempt. Given the right situation, I am capable of any sin, and so are you. Jeremiah 17:9-10 says, **“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? 10 But I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve.”**

We not only overestimate our strengths, we also misuse our strengths. You tend to guard your weaknesses because you know where you’re weak. So you say to yourself, “I must stay away from my weakness,” but you don’t pay any attention to your strengths, and when you don’t pay attention to your strengths they become weaknesses also. Please write this in your notes: **An unguarded strength is a double weakness.** In the very area where you say to yourself, “There’s no way I can mess up in this area,” you’re setting yourself up for failure. Why? Because of pride, and it blinds you to your weak spots and strengths. Have you ever noticed that sometimes, after you have had some significant success, you’re tempted and can fail? Jesus was

tempted immediately after His baptism, and He heard the Father say, “This is My dearly loved Son, who brings Me great joy”. The next verse, in 4:1, says that Jesus was led immediately by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by the devil. Peter has one of his biggest failures just after having shared an intimate moment with Jesus in the last supper. We overestimate our strengths and our weaknesses and this is a major cause of many of our own personal failures.

B. We fear the disapproval of others

You may not know this, but this causes more problems in your life than almost anything else. We fear the disapproval of other people. Every time you make a decision based on what other people will think, you are sowing the seeds for failure in your life. Often when we become a people pleaser, you become a coward. You make commitments that you can't possibly keep simply because you're trying to make everyone happy. This is the 2nd reason why Peter failed in his denials about Jesus. In Matthew 26:70, 72 and 74, twice a servant girl pointed to Peter and said, “You were one of those with Jesus,” and he denied it. In verse 73 the Bible says that bystanders said to Peter that, “You must be one of His followers because you have a Galilean accent?” After the 3rd denial, v. 75 says, **“Suddenly, Jesus’ words flashed through Peter’s mind: ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know Me.’ And he went away, weeping bitterly.”** This is incredible, friends. Peter had spent 3-½ years with Jesus in about every situation possible. He saw Him still wind and the waves. Raised people from the dead. Watched Him walk on water. Witnessed Jesus multiplying a few loaves of bread and fishes for well over 10,000 people. Then under pressure where he was feeling humiliation, fear, rejection, and abandonment, and most likely was fearful he might end up just like Jesus, he denied Him. He flinched at the fear of disapproval and rejection and he denied Jesus. Peter struggled with people-pleasing his entire life. In the book of Galatians Paul rebukes Peter for treating the Gentiles one way when his fellow Jews weren't around, and then he rejected them when the Jews were in town. Paul called him a people-pleaser and a hypocrite. Most likely it was his hurts, habits and hang-ups that caused him to turn his back on Jesus. I like to call it soul pain. It's some deep pain, and it's usually always related to your identity and self-esteem. If you don't know who God has made you as a woman, who God

has made you as a man, you will be set up to be manipulated by the disapproval of other people the rest of your life. Proverbs 29:25 says, **“Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the Lord means safety.”** Fearing people is a second cause of most of our own personal failures.

C. We speak without thinking

This just could be the most common cause of the majority of the failures in our lives. We put our mouth in motion before we put our mind in gear. We often times will speak impulsively, rashly, in haste, and we speak thoughtlessly. We don't pause to consider the damage of what we're about to say or what it will do in other people's lives. Too often we speak too emotionally, and we're not thinking rationally enough. You don't think about the unintended consequence of what you're about to say. You don't stop and say, “Jesus, do You want me to say this? Is this the right thing and the right time to say this?” Often times we just go ahead and say whatever we feel. Peter because of fear of being identified with Jesus, knowing that most likely He was going to be crucified, did not want to be identified with Him, and he spoke without thinking three times and denied Jesus Christ. We get ourselves in trouble because of our tongue. The Bible has a lot to say about the poisonous potential of our tongue, and one of the most poignant passages in the Bible about our tongue is James 3:5-6: **“The tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. 6 And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.”** Have you noticed that a few words spoken in anger can destroy a relationship that took years to build? Before you speak, the Bible says remember that your words are like fire; you can neither control nor reverse the damage they can do. Speaking without thinking is the third common cause of our own personal failures.

II. What do I do when I fail?

Three things Peter did right:

A. Grieve

You grieve your failure. You don't minimize the failure. You don't pretend it didn't happen. You don't justify, or rationalize or make excuses for the failure. You grieve it. You allow yourself to feel the full pain of it. You don't brush it off. You don't downplay it. You lean into the pain and don't rush to feel better. This is a very important truth in life most of us don't know or don't believe. It is this: To get past our pain we must go through our pain and failure. This is true in every area of our lives. To process your failure, you must be willing to own it, feel it and process your pain. You can't go around your failure, or go over your failure, or go under your failure, or try to ignore it. The only way you can break the hold that failure has in your life is to accept it, feel it and grieve it. Too many people want to take short cuts when they have a failure. They want to bypass the affair or the sex addiction. They just want to put it out of sight and mind and go on. Yes, I had a failed business, but I'm going go out and start another one right now, the next day. Yes, I just had a marriage fail, but I'm going to turn around and find someone else immediately. They rebound into another relationship and they never learn the lessons of why and how their first marriage failed. Here is the issue, loved ones. The problem is you don't go through the grief, you don't learn what God wants you to learn from that failure, and then you take the same old you into a new relationship or marriage or into a new goal or into the new dream, but nothing's changed, because you didn't learn anything, because you weren't willing to feel bad for any length of time. The greater the failure and the greater the loss in your life the more time it's going to take. You must let God work in your heart. You cannot force healing. You cannot rush feelings. You cannot will by sheer will power--I'm going to be different now. You can't do it. God didn't design you to get over deep hurt, habits and hang-ups fast. Recovery is an act of God's mercy, loved ones. Healing is an act of God's mercy, and it comes slowly with time. And recovery and growth come in stages. All God wants you to do it just be honest. I failed. I blew it. Be humble and admit what you have done. Psalm 51:17 says, **"The sacrifice You desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God."** This is exactly what Peter did in Matthew 26:75 **"Suddenly, Jesus' words flashed through Peter's mind: 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know Me.' And he went away, weeping bitterly."** Peter started grieving his failure of denying Jesus. Here is the different between Judas and Peter. Judas didn't grieve. He had terrible remorse, but he did not humble himself and repent. He

went and hung himself. Peter wept bitterly because he denied Jesus, but he repented and asked for forgiveness and received it and went on to be a powerful witness for Jesus Christ. One took his life, the other grieved and surrendered his life and willingly laid his life down for Jesus. Repent and grieve when you fail.

B. Let my small group support me

This is exactly what Peter did. The very first thing Jesus did when He started His ministry was He formed a small group. He chose 12 men to be His small group. This is why we make such a big deal here at CVCHURCH about small groups. Especially when I feel like I am failing, it is so important to have a group of people I can trust and turn to, and they will love me, support, accept, care for me, and care-front when I need it. There is profound support to be experienced in a small group. In Mark 16:10 the Bible says, “**She (Mary Magdalene) went to the disciples, who were grieving and weeping, and told them what happened.**” I want you to listen to me very closely. When you go through a major failure in your life, you must resist the urge to isolate yourself. **(DEAN, COME UP FRONT NOW AND STAND BESIDE SCOTT.)** When you go through a major failure in life, you must resist the urge to insulate yourself. When you get laid off from work, you don’t want anyone to know about it. When you have a failure in your life you want to keep it secret. That’s the worst thing you could do. You don’t need to tell everyone, but you do need to tell a few people who love you, who are going to pray for you and who will support you. When you share a problem in your life, it’s cut in half. When you share a joy in your small group it’s doubled. You were never meant to go through life on your own. I have asked Dean Kirchner to share how his small group has been there for him when he has needed them.

DEAN KIRCHNER

C. Place my confidence in God’s mercy

We know from reading 1 & 2 Peter that this was a very powerful lesson that Peter learned in his life, especially in his failure of denying Jesus 3x’s. He starts 1 Peter off with vs. 3 “**All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by**

His great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead.” Peter had had this massive failure in his life, but he’s not going around in despair or condemnation or guilt or shame or regret. Why? Because of God’s mercy. And, later in this same book, Peter says this that comes from his own personal experience. 1 Peter 5:7 says, **“Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about you.”** This is what Peter did after he failed Jesus. He went through a process of learning to place his confidence in God’s mercy. Other translations translate the GK word *Ballo* to cast something like throwing or slinging a rock. Peter says this is how you place your confidence in God’s mercy. You take your worries, stress, cares, frustrations, anxieties, anger, hate, hurts, habits, and hang-ups and you throw them, you cast and sling them, at Jesus’ feet. Just drop whatever it is this morning (afternoon) you’re carrying that you’re not supposed to carry. What does it mean to place your confidence in God’s mercy? It means to pray something like this: you say, “God, there is no way I deserve Your forgiveness. I really failed. I blew it. I have thumbed my nose at You. I’ve ignored You so much of my life. I’ve made dumb mistakes. But, God, I know You are a kind, gracious, loving, merciful, slow to anger God. I need a fresh start. I don’t deserve it. I cannot earn it, but, in Your mercy, I recognize You say I can come to You, and You will love and accept me. So I come to You today and cast all of my cares on You, because You truly do care for me.”

III. What does Jesus do with our failures?

A. Jesus isn’t shocked

He isn’t shocked with your failure. Satan wants to sift you. Look at what Jesus said to Peter before he denied Jesus three times in Luke 22:31-32, **“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. 32 But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to Me again, strengthen your brothers.”** Jesus predicted Peter’s failure before it happened. He even said, “You’re going to deny Me.” God is never surprised or caught off guard by anything you do or any decision you make, whether it is good or bad. He already knows everything in advance. He knows your weak spots. The Bible says in Psalm 103:14, **“For**

He knows how weak we are; He remembers we are only dust.” God knows we’re not god. We’re not perfect. We’re human beings. We mess up and fail. We falter, fall, fumble and flub up. He knows our frame. So just relax, loved ones. When you sin and fail, He is not surprised, sad or sorrowful. Like with Peter, He sees what we can be, and He is committed to giving us His power so we can actualize His fullest potential for us.

B. Jesus prays for us

Jesus prays for us. Jesus told Peter before he had even failed, “Peter, this is going to happen. But I’ve already prayed for you that your faith will not fail.” Jesus’ prayers are answered. I’ve prayed for you that you will not fail. Hebrews 7:25 talks about Jesus praying for us. **“Jesus is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through Him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.”** No one can add to what Jesus did to save us; our past, present, and future sins are all forgiven, and Jesus is with the Father as a sign that our sins are forgiven. As our High Priest, Christ is our advocate, the mediator between us and God. He looks after our interests and intercedes for us with God. The Old Testament high priest went before God once a year to plead for the forgiveness of the nation’s sins; Jesus Christ makes perpetual continual intercession before God for us. Christ’s continuous presence in heaven with the Father assures us that our sins have been paid for and forgiven. Loved friend, it is this wonderful assurance that frees us from guilt and from fear of failure. If you are a Christian, remember that Jesus Christ has paid the price for your sins once and for all.

C. Jesus believes in us

I love this, don’t you? Jesus truly believes in us. In fact, He expects us to recover. This is why He told Peter--even before Peter’s big failure--He said, in Luke 22:32, **“But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So, when you have repented and turned to Me again, strengthen your brothers.”** He didn’t say, “If you repent or it might not happen.” Jesus said, “I know you’re going to come back to Me. You’re going to sin, Pete. You’re going to fail. You’re going to make mistakes. But you will come back to Me.” Loved ones,

this is one of the true signs of a true believer. Please read with me Proverbs 24:16a, **“The godly may trip seven times, but they will get up again.”** What I love about this verse is it says even men and women who are committed to God will trip, stumble and fall, but the difference is that they will get back up with the Holy Spirit’s help. Have you noticed that your biggest weaknesses are habitual? You don’t just do them one time and that’s it. You do them over and over and over. Jesus says to you today, “My mercy is for your everyday mess up that you do twenty times an hour.” All of a sudden, you take back control, and you start worrying again and again and again. “You worry, and I told you don’t worry. But My mercy will forgive 9000 and 1 million times because I am a merciful God.” Friends, Jesus is more willing to show you mercy than you’re willing to ask for it. I thrill at Mark 16:6-7 after the women have entered the tomb they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. The Bible says they were shocked, vs. 6 **“But the angel said, ‘Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn’t here! He is raised from the dead! Look, this is where they laid His body. 7 Now go and tell His disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Him there, just as He told you before He died.’”** Why did the angel say, including Peter? Because God knew that Peter was flailing under guilt, shame and humiliation for failing Jesus when Jesus needed him the most. Listen, loved friends, when you fail, God knows your name. And He gives you a personal word of encouragement. “Go tell My disciples. And especially tell Peter. I know how bad he feels about what he did. Go tell him I’m alive and I have kept my promise.” And He singles him out. Church, this is love. No matter what you have done. No matter how bad you have failed Him. Maybe you have turned your back on His purposes and plans for you. Please hear Him say to you, **“I BELIEVE IN YOU. Put your trust in My love, acceptance and forgiveness I have for you.”**

D. Jesus shows us mercy when we’re down

Jesus shows us mercy when we’re down. He doesn't beat us up or pile on or add guilt or scorn or shame or scold us. He loves us. He saves us. When you have failed, He doesn’t just come in and say, “Let me tell you how bad you’ve done.” No. He shows mercy when we’re down. There is a very tender example of how

Jesus deals with Peter after Jesus was resurrected from the dead in John 21:1-14. In frustration, Peter had said to the other disciples, "I'm going back to fishing." Peter hasn't recovered from his failure yet. I believe when he said he was going fishing he was saying, "I'm done with this being a fisher of men deal Jesus said I would be profound at." He is terribly depressed. Peter is saying I'm going back to what I was trained to do and what I was good at. Peter was a professional fisherman. That was his comfort zone. The disciples said, "We're going with you." After an all-night session of fishing, they had caught nothing. They see a man on the shore but they didn't know it was Jesus. He calls out, "Friends, have you caught any fish?" "Not a thing," they replied. Jesus says, "Throw out your nets on the right hand side of the boat, and you'll get plenty of fish. They did what Jesus told them to do, and they caught so many fish they couldn't haul the net into the boat. During this time, John recognized it was Jesus, and when he told Peter, he jumped into the water and swam to shore. When they all got to the shore, they found that Jesus had fish and bread cooking on a charcoal fire. Jesus said, "Come and have some breakfast," and the Bible says none of the disciples asked Him who He was because they knew who He was. Notice Jesus didn't rebuke them or scold them. Vs. 14 says this was the third time Jesus had appeared to them since He was raised from the dead. After watching the tragedy of Jesus being beaten and murdered in front of them, Jesus treats them to breakfast, and then He tenderly care-fronts Peter by asking Him three times, "Do you love Me?" After the 3rd time, John tells us that Peter was hurt. What was Jesus doing telling him each time, "Feed My lambs, care for My sheep and feed My lambs?" Jesus wanted to take him through the pain of his three denials so He could help him work through his denial, rejection and failure. Jesus came to Peter and says, "I forgive you. Now you must receive my forgiveness and acceptance, and get on with My purpose and plan." Where have you failed, and you thought that it has disqualified you from God's love, acceptance, forgiveness and serving Him and people? Hear Jesus say to you today, "Do you love Me?" And then, "Start serving My church and the world."

E. Jesus uses our failures to build His church

This is amazing, loved ones. Jesus doesn't use my natural strengths and abilities to build His church as much as uses all of the lessons I am willing to learn from

my failures. Jesus told Peter in Luke 22:32 “Peter when you have turned back to Me, strengthen and build up your brothers.” Jesus is saying, “All of My disciples and followers saw you fail. Now get up and go love them, lead them and lay down your life for them.” Judas failed and refused to repent and took his life. Peter failed, but he repented and turned his life back to Jesus. They were the exact same sin, just different responses. Judas turned his back on Jesus. He became a traitor. Peter betrayed Jesus and became a leader and teacher in the early church. Question? What are you going to become from your failure? What are you going to allow the failures in your life to make you--a traitor or a teacher? It's your choice. The fact is God is building His church on people who've failed. God only uses failures because there are no perfect people. Loved ones, God doesn't want you to waste your pain. What is your darkest secret? Your deepest humiliation and shame? Jesus wants to love you in the place of your greatest despair and bring healing to you, because He wants to use you to build His church. This is the mercy of God. Would you pray this prayer with me? “Father God, I've had a lot of failures in my life. Like Peter, I've overestimated my strengths. I said I'd never do that but I have. And I have feared the disapproval of other people. I've been quiet, and I've been a coward, and I have denied You when I could have spoken up for You at work. I was more worried about their disapproval, and I've fallen into that trap. I have spoken without thinking, and my tongue has gotten me in trouble. I want to do the right things that Peter did. I'm coming to You to say Lord, my heart is broken. I repent. I have a contrite attitude. I'm a little more humble than I used to be. I repent of my selfish way, and I turn my life over to You. Forgive me for the times that I've isolated myself and tried to handle everything on my own and to want people to know about my pain. Lord, I cast myself on Your mercy. I cast my anxiety, insecurity and fears at Your feet. You are a faithful God. Great is Your faithfulness. I want You to use my failures to build Your church. In Jesus' name I pray.