

Unit II: Grace and Reconciliation

If at First You Don't Succeed, You're Probably Human

DEVOTIONAL READING: Colossians 2:1-7

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Matthew 4:18-20; 16:15-18;
Luke 2:40, 52; John 1:40-42; 21:15-19; 21:15-19;
Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 1:6, 9-11; 3:12-16;
Colossians 1:9-11; Hebrews 6:1-3; 2 Peter 3:14-18

PRINT PASSAGES: Matthew 4:18-20; 16:16-18; John 21:15-18; 2 Peter 3:14-15, 18

KEY VERSE

He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. (John 21:17, KJV)
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The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” (John 21:17, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Examine the confidence Jesus continued to express in Peter despite his shortcomings and failures.
- Receive the love and encouragement that Jesus offers in our growing faith.
- Offer patience and encouragement to young disciples who desire to grow in faith.

*Key Terms

Blessed (Matthew 16:17)—Greek: *makarios* (mak-ar'-ee-os): happy; fortunate; favored by God.



The Biblical Context

Matthew 4:18-20 marks the start of Jesus' public ministry and the moment He calls His first disciples, right after His baptism, His time of testing in the wilderness, and the beginning of His preaching. One of the first men Jesus called was Simon, later known as Peter—the main focus of this lesson. Peter became a key leader among the twelve disciples and in the early church. Peter's life showed both great faith and serious struggles. He was passionate and devoted, but he also had moments of fear, doubt, and impulsive behavior. His lowest moment came when he denied knowing Jesus three times, showing how human weakness and fear can take over.

Later, in John 21:15-18, Jesus appeared to His disciples after rising from the dead. In this moment, He gently restored Peter, forgiving him and calling him back to ministry. Finally, in 2 Peter 3:14-15, 18—part of Peter's last letter before he was killed in Rome—he encouraged believers to stay strong in their faith, keep growing spiritually, and stay prepared for Jesus' return, even in the face of false teaching and hard times.

The real issue when we stumble—on purpose or by accident—is how we recover, what we learn, and how we repair our walk with the Lord. God invites us to bring our wounds to Him and start again.

Look at Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends and disciples. His story shows many highs and lows. In fear, he even swore that he did not know Jesus. Peter's journey proves that God can use our failures to grow us. After Jesus renewed their friendship, Peter discovered the key: keep moving forward, day by day, in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

Casting (Matthew 4:18)—Greek: *balló* (bal'-lo): throwing; putting; placing; thrusting; sending.

Followed (Matthew 4:20)—Greek: *akoloutheó* (ak'-ol-oo-theh'-o): accompanied as a disciple.

Girdest (John 21:18)—Greek: *zónnumi* (dzone'-noo-mi): fastened with a belt; get “dressed” (NIV).

Longsuffering (2 Peter 3:15)—Greek: *makrothumia* (mak-roth-oo-mee'-ah): forbearance; fortitude; slowness in avenging wrongs; “patience” (NIV).

Rock (Matthew 16:18)—Greek: *petra* (pet'-ra)—large stone; metaphorically, a man like a rock, by reason of his firmness and strength of soul.

***Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2**

Introduction

Many people call themselves *perfectionists*—folks who aim high and expect to reach every goal. They demand top results and instantly spot tiny flaws. Yet, these same perfectionists still make mistakes, battle doubts, criticize themselves, feel like failures, and suffer painful emotions. The reality is that no one avoids mistakes, no matter how gifted, skilled, or faithful they might be. Everyone, even committed Christians, stumbles sooner or later in life. The reason goes back to Adam. His choice to disobey God let sin into the world, damaged human nature, and set us all on a broken road. Because of that fall, despite our faith and devotion, we will slip up and disappoint ourselves, others, and God. Failure is certain, but despair is optional.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Stumbling and Rising (Matthew 4:18-20; 16:16-18; John 21:15-18)

KJV

18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

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16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

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15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

18 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.

NIV

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."

20 At once they left their nets and followed him.

.....

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.

18 “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

.....

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

16 Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

17 The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

18 “Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”

Peter’s initial call to discipleship was marked by immediate obedience and a willing heart to participate in Jesus’ evangelistic mission (Matthew 4:18-20). He also boldly declared a Spirit-directed confession of Jesus as the Messiah—an acknowledgment that reflected his openness to divine truth and growing faith. In response, Jesus affirmed Peter’s role in the church’s future, commanding his insight and commissioning him with a leading responsibility in the church’s formation (Matthew 16:16-18). However, a great beginning does not guarantee a smooth journey; because of our human weakness, struggles and failures often accompany spiritual growth. Though genuinely devoted to Christ and full of impulsive passion, Peter experienced profound lows along the way. His most painful failure came when he publicly denied knowing Jesus three times before the Crucifixion—an act that brought guilt, shame, and heartbreak.

Yet, after the Resurrection, Jesus graciously confronted Peter’s denial, not with condemnation but with restoration. In a threefold question, “Do you love me?”—mirroring Peter’s threefold denial—Jesus forgave, restored, and recommissioned him. He charged Peter to feed and tend His sheep, revealing that true love for Christ is expressed in caring for others actively and compassionately (John 21:15-17). With that recommissioning came a sobering truth: Jesus revealed that Peter’s love and obedience would one day cost him his life—death by crucifixion, just as his Master had endured (John 21:18). From Peter’s calling to his stumbling, and ultimately to his restoration, we learn a powerful truth: our failures do not disqualify us from fulfilling the unique purpose that God has for our lives. Because of His grace, God still uses imperfect people to serve as His faithful disciples.

⌚ WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How do Jesus' words to Peter help shape our understanding of forgiveness and restoration when we fail as believers?

The Remedy for Stumbling (2 Peter 3:14-15, 18)

KJV

14 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.
15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;
.....
18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

NIV

14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.
15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.
.....
18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Peter's spiritual journey as a disciple of Christ is a powerful model of perseverance and growth. His life illustrates that mistakes and failures do not disqualify us from being valuable to God. Peter's final epistle, 2 Peter, reveals how seriously he embraced his grace-filled restoration. He didn't waste the mercy he received; instead, Peter learned from his mistakes and matured spiritually. In chapter 3 of his letter, Peter confronts false teachings meant to mislead believers, particularly about Christ's return. He urges Christians to remain grounded in their faith and to live in anticipation of Jesus' promised return. Drawing from personal experience, Peter reassures his readers that what seems like a delay in Christ's return is actually a demonstration of God's patient mercy—giving more people time to receive salvation. Peter knew this mercy firsthand. After denying Christ three times, he was restored and reinstated as a disciple and became a testimony of God's grace.

Once impulsive and unstable in his spiritual walk, Peter explains how believers can persevere and grow spiritually, even after failure. He encourages them in verse 14 to be "found spotless, blameless, and at peace with God." Though our salvation is secure, Peter calls believers to

intentionally pursue peace with God and a lifestyle that reflects increasing spiritual maturity. In verse 15, Peter reminds his audience again that the delay of Christ's return is not divine neglect but divine patience rooted in love. It's the same message Paul preached; both men deeply understood the long, suffering grace of God in their own lives. Peter closes his letter by urging believers to keep growing in two vital areas: grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—essential disciplines for learning and growing from mistakes. He ends with a fitting doxology, giving Christ the glory due to Him, now and forever (verse 18).

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What are some practical ways to “grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ” to enhance spiritual maturity?

A Closing Thought

No Christian will live a perfect life without mistakes—spiritually or otherwise. We still struggle with our human nature, and even with good intentions, we will sometimes fail. Peter's highs and lows as a disciple show this clearly. His life also proves that we can grow, mature, and still be used by God, even after we mess up. In 2 Peter 3:18, Peter gives us the answer: keep growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. That's how we become strong enough to do what Jesus told Peter to do—take care of and help other believers grow in their faith (John 21:17).

Your Life

This lesson challenges us with the reality that because we are human, we will inevitably make mistakes, stumble, and fail (as Peter did) at some point in our spiritual journey. However, like him, we must continue to return to and grow in our knowledge of Christ, learn from our struggles, and rely on the Holy Spirit for strength, direction, discernment, guidance, and wisdom.

Your World!

Peter went from a strong faith to failure—but after repenting, he was restored. Over time, he grew in maturity and was able to help others keep going amid hard times. Many believers struggle with guilt and shame from past mistakes. Peter's story shows us that failure isn't the end . . . God can still use us. Let Peter's example remind you and others that it's possible to learn from mistakes, rely on God's patience and mercy, and keep growing in faith no matter what you've been through. There's always hope and a path forward with God.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank You for providing Peter's life as an example for us to follow when we experience shortcomings and failure. You extend patient grace to us through Jesus Christ. In gratitude, we commit to offering patience and encouragement to young and new disciples

who desire to learn from their mistakes and grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson explores addressing and resisting threats to the spiritual unity that God expects to characterize the faith community. Read Mark 4:26-32; Ephesians 4:4-6, 11-16.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, January 26	“A Community of Testimony and Praise”	(Psalm 22:22-28)
TUESDAY, January 27	“A Community of Hope-filled Heirs”	(Ephesians 1:15-23)
WEDNESDAY, January 28	“A Community with Divine Authority”	(Matthew 16:13-20)
THURSDAY, January 29	“A Community Made Strong Together”	(Ecclesiastes 4:7-12)
FRIDAY, January 30	“A Community United in Worship”	(Psalm 150)
SATURDAY, January 31	“A Community Silently Growing”	(Mark 4:26-32)
SUNDAY, February 1	“A Community of Oneness”	(Ephesians 4:4-16)

Notes