

MERCY WITHIN FAILURE

John 18:15-18, 25-27; 21:15-19

Some people have no conscience, or at least it seems like it. Others of us have consciences that won't shut up. We keep mentally going over our mistakes: *If only I hadn't said that . . . If only I hadn't done that . . . If only I had said that or had done that . . . But I failed. Yes, I knew Christ was sufficient to help me, but I didn't avail myself of his help and now all is lost.* Or is it?

Peter professed absolute loyalty to his Lord, promising to go with him even to death. Shortly afterward Peter lied and said he did not even know Jesus. Who could forgive failure like that and restore such a person to fellowship and useful life again? Only Jesus himself, the very one Peter had so miserably failed.

Group Discussion. What are some good and bad ways people cope with failure?

Personal Reflection. Recall a time you overcame failure. How did it happen?

Despite Peter's bold proclamations of faithfulness, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times that same night (John 13:36-38). The disciples scattered when Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:50), but Peter and another disciple returned and followed the arresting party to the home of the high priest. *Read John 18:15-18, 25-27.*

1. Despite having fled earlier, how did Peter show that he still felt loyal to Jesus (vv. 15-18)?

2. At the same time, how did Peter show disloyalty to Jesus (v. 17)?

3. How do you account for the discrepancy between Peter's actions and his words?

4. Imagine that you are Peter immediately after you answer the girl's question (v. 17). What is going through your mind and heart at that moment?

5. Still thinking of yourself as Peter, at that moment, what does your future look like?

6. In verses 19-24 the scene shifts to the home of Annas, the Jewish high priest. There Jesus maintained his dignity and his innocence in the face of humiliating interrogation. He was sent on to Caiaphas. The Gospel scene reverts to Peter warming himself beside the courtyard fire. What words and phrases would you use for Peter's replies to the questions he was asked (vv. 25-27)?

7. The rooster crowed after Peter denied Jesus for the third time, just as Jesus had predicted (John 13:36-38). Two other Gospels report that Peter “went outside and wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:75; Luke 22:62). Probably you have not been in such an extreme situation as Peter, but you may have sometimes denied knowing Christ either by what you said or by what you did not say. Afterward, how did your emotions compare with those of Peter?

8. There are many ways we fail other people, whether family, friends, employers, employees, church members, even strangers we meet. How is failing other people actually failing Christ?

After Mary Magdalene reported that Jesus’ tomb was empty, Peter and “the other disciple” ran to the tomb. During the following week, Jesus appeared to all the disciples, proving that he was alive again. Some time afterward, Peter and six other disciples went fishing on the Sea of Galilee, familiar territory for several of them. They caught nothing all night. Early in the morning Jesus appeared on the shore. He directed them to a miraculously large catch of fish, some of which they cooked and ate together. *Read John 21:15-19.*

9. Why do you think Jesus asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?”

10. How did Jesus assure Peter that he was forgiven and restored to his role as a disciple?

11. What hope does Peter's restoration give to Christians who have failed the Lord?

12. What hope does Peter's restoration give you?

13. This week, if you are tempted to beat yourself up or wallow in the knowledge of past failures, how will you use this study as a source of encouragement and reassurance?



Thank the Lord for his mercy. Praise him that no matter how often or how badly you have failed him, he died for those sins and he lives to raise you up again.

NOW OR LATER

Study Psalm 51, David's prayer of repentance and renewed hope after Nathan confronted him about his sin with Bathsheba.

Look back over all the studies in this guide. What new insights have you gained about the all-sufficiency of Christ? In what areas of your life do you have more confidence that you can trust him? Where do you still need more of that confidence?