

Big Idea: God still loves us... even when we turn our backs on Him

Primary Scripture: Luke 22:54-62, John 21:15-19

Supporting Scripture: 1 John 1:9

CAPTURE (Why should students pay attention to and care about your message?)

- When I was your age, I had a moment that still makes me cringe.
- There was this kid in my school named Marcus who wasn't popular and was an easy target. For weeks, I'd watched this group of guys make his life miserable.
- I liked Marcus. He was smart, funny, and genuinely kind. More than that, I knew exactly what it felt like to be on the outside looking in. I'd promised myself that if I ever saw someone else going through that, I'd step up.
- I was standing by my locker when I heard a commotion. Marcus was surrounded by the same group of guys, and one of them had grabbed his backpack, threatening to throw it in the trash. Marcus was trying to laugh it off, but he looked desperate, scanning the hallway for anyone who might help.
- I had a choice. I could walk over there. I could say something. I could be the person I'd always told myself I would be. Or I could pretend I didn't see it and walk away.
- I'm embarrassed to say that I chose to walk away.
- I told myself I was being smart, avoiding drama. But the truth was simpler and uglier: **I was scared**. Scared of becoming their next target. Scared of what people would think.
- For the rest of that day, the image of Marcus's face kept replaying in my mind—the disappointment, the realization that even someone he thought might help had abandoned him.
- Have you ever had a moment where you stayed silent when someone was spreading lies about your friend?
- We all have moments where we discover the gap between who we want to be and who we actually are when the pressure is on.

- In those moments, it's easy to think we've disqualified ourselves from ever being the person God wants us to be.
- But failure isn't the end of your story. It doesn't have to define you.
- The next day, I found Marcus at lunch, sat down next to him and we just talked. I didn't try to fix everything, I just showed up.
- It didn't erase everything, but it was a step toward becoming the person I wanted to be instead of staying stuck in the shame of who I'd been in that moment.

SCRIPTURE (What does God's Word say?)

- Today, we're going to meet someone who thought his failure was so big that there was no coming back from it.
- His name was Peter, one of Jesus' disciples. And when he needed to show up for Jesus the most, he turned his back and walked away.
- But as we'll see, that wasn't the end of Peter's story—it was just the beginning of understanding how deep God's love really goes.
- To understand Peter's failure, you need to know the context.
- Just hours before, Peter had been bold and confident.
- When Jesus warned His disciples that they would all abandon Him, Peter spoke up, saying, "Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you!"
- Peter was absolutely convinced he was different, that his loyalty was unshakeable.
- But then Jesus was arrested, and everything changed.

⁵⁴ So they arrested him and led him to the high priest's home. And Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵ The guards lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat around it, and Peter joined them there. (Luke 22:54-55 – NLT)

- Peter followed, but "at a distance." He wanted to be loyal, but he also wanted to be safe. He was trying to have it both ways.
- Sometimes we want to follow Jesus, but only as long as it's comfortable, only as long as it doesn't **cost** anything.

⁵⁶ A servant girl noticed him in the firelight and began staring at him. Finally she said, "This man was one of Jesus' followers!" ⁵⁷ But Peter denied it. "Woman," he said, "I don't even know him!" (Luke 22:56-57 – NLT)

- It wasn't a threatening soldier or religious leader who confronted Peter—it was a servant girl.
- Peter's response was immediate: "I don't even know him!"
- Think about how that must have felt to say those words about someone he spent three years with and called Teacher, Lord, friend.

⁵⁸ After a while someone else looked at him and said, "You must be one of them!" "No, man, I'm not!" Peter retorted. (Luke 22:58 – NLT)

- Peter's response gets shorter and more defensive.
- Peter's not getting more comfortable—he's getting more desperate.

⁵⁹ About an hour later someone else insisted, "This must be one of them, because he is a Galilean, too." ⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I don't know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. (Luke 22:59-60 – NLT)

- It's likely that Peter's accent gave him away—people could tell he was from the same region as Jesus.
- Peter doubled down. "I don't know what you're talking about."
- Then came the sound that Jesus had predicted: the rooster's crow.

⁶¹ At that moment the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Suddenly, the Lord's words flashed through Peter's mind: "Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me." ⁶² And Peter left the courtyard, weeping bitterly. (Luke 22:61-62 – NLT)

- This is one of the most powerful moments in all of Scripture.
- Jesus, in the middle of His own trial and suffering, takes a moment to look at Peter.
- It's a look of understanding, of love, of "I know what you're going through."
- Peter remembers Jesus' prediction, realizes what he's done, and breaks down completely.

- Peter thought this was the end of his story. But Jesus wasn't done with Peter.
- Fast forward about six weeks to after Jesus' death and resurrection. Peter and some of the other disciples have gone back to fishing to figure out what comes next after such spectacular failure.
- While they are still fishing, the disciples realize that Jesus is on the shore cooking breakfast. Peter jumps into the water and swims to shore.

15 After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” Peter replied, “you know I love you.” “Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him. (John 21:15 – NLT)

- Jesus doesn't bring up Peter's failure. He doesn't say, "Remember when you denied me three times?" Instead, He asks about love.
- He's giving Peter a chance to affirm what matters most—their relationship.
- Then Jesus gives Peter a mission: "Feed my lambs." Even after Peter's failure, Jesus still trusts him with responsibility.

16 Jesus repeated the question: “Simon son of John, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord,” Peter said, “you know I love you.” “Then take care of my sheep,” Jesus said. (John 21:16 – NLT)

- Again, Jesus doesn't look backward. He points forward.

17 A third time he asked him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep.” (John 21:17 – NLT)

- Jesus is redeeming Peter's worst moment, covering it with grace.
- Jesus is telling Peter, "I'm not done with you."

18 “I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go.” 19 Jesus said this to let him know by

what kind of death he would glorify God. Then Jesus told him, “Follow me.” (John 21:18-19 – NLT)

- Jesus ends with an invitation: “*Follow Me.*”
- Peter failed, but Jesus wasn’t done. His love never changed.
- Peter turned his back on Jesus, but Jesus never turned His back on Peter. And the same is true for us.

INSIGHTS (What might this Scripture mean?)

1. Your failure doesn’t have to be final.

- What Peter didn't understand in that moment is that ***failure is an event, not an identity.***
- Peter's failure wasn't the end of his story—it was actually the beginning of discovering just how far God's love really extends.
- God's grace is bigger than your biggest failure.

2. Repentance leads to restoration.

- There's a difference between feeling bad because you got in trouble and feeling bad because you genuinely realize you've done something wrong.
- When Jesus found Peter after the resurrection, Jesus asked, "Do you love me?" Three times—the same number of times Peter denied Him.
- Jesus was inviting Peter the chance to rebuild what had been broken.
- That's how repentance works. It's not just feeling sorry—it's turning back toward the relationship that matters most.
- When we do that, God doesn't just forgive us; He actively works to restore what we thought was broken beyond repair.

3. God still has a purpose for you.

- Jesus gave Peter one of the most important jobs imaginable: caring for and leading God's people.
- Your calling from God isn't dependent on your perfect performance.

- Peter went on to become one of the most influential leaders in the early church.
- Your worst moment doesn't cancel your purpose—it often becomes part of how God wants to use you to help others.

ACTION (How could we live this out?)

1. Let go of a past failure.

- This week, think of one specific failure that you've been holding onto.
- Write it down. Be honest about what happened and how it's affected you. Don't minimize it or make excuses—just name it for what it is.
- Then, pray something like this: "God, I'm letting go of this and giving it to You. I know Your grace is bigger than this failure. Help me learn from it without being defined by it."
- After you pray, do something symbolic with that piece of paper. You could tear it up, burn it (safely), or bury it in your backyard.
- The point isn't the specific action—it's the physical reminder that you're choosing to let go of this failure instead of carrying it forever.

⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. (1 John 1:9 – NLT)

- When you bring your failure to God, He doesn't just forgive—He cleanses and frees you from carrying that weight anymore.
- This is about refusing to let that moment define the rest of your story.

2. Turn restoration into action.

- This week choose one specific way to serve someone else **especially** if you don't feel like you've got your life figured out.
- You don't have to start a nonprofit or change the world. Start simple:
 - Help a friend who's struggling with something you've experienced.
 - Reach out to someone who seems lonely or left out.

- Use your skills to help someone else succeed.
 - Be the encouragement for someone that you wish you'd had during your difficult time.
 - Your mess can become your message. Your struggle can become your strength in helping others.
1. Don't wait until you feel qualified—Peter's story shows us that God often uses our brokenness as the very thing that makes us effective in serving others.