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Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
Failing Forward
John 21:1-19
September 23, 2018

I want to do another live poll this morning.

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For those of you who are new here and haven't done this before, what you can do, if you have a smart phone or a tablet, is open up your web browser and go to www.menti.com and type in the code 186076 when asked.

The question you will be answering is, "Have you ever failed terribly at something?" You have four choices: 1. No. I'm a winner; 2. Yes, but I have gotten over it; 3. Yes, but I am getting over it; and 4. Yes, and I still carry the emotional weight from it.

For those of you who don't have the technology to participate electronically, we will also do a show of hands. But, I do want to do this visual as well. For those of you who are listening to the podcast, or watching the video later on, you can also participate in the poll. We will embed the poll on our website on the sermon page so the poll will continually update.

Now, let's do a show of hands.

1. How many of you have ever failed terribly at something?
2. How many have never failed at anything?
3. How many have had a big failure, but are totally over it? It doesn't bother you at all anymore?
4. How many of you have failed at something and you are in the process of getting over it?
5. How many of you have failed at something and you still carry emotional weight from the failure?

The truth is that that failure is a part of everyone's life. It is inescapable, so we need to know how to deal with it.

Last Sunday we looked at the very last verses of the Gospel of Matthew. Today we are going to look at the very last verses of the Gospel of John. John is a very different book compared to Matthew, and the other two Gospels as well, Mark and Luke. The writing style is completely different. Most of John deals with the last few days and hours of Jesus life. It's a very engaging book. If you haven't read it yet make sure you do. It is a beautiful read.

[3]

Before we read our passage let me fill you in on the context. It's actually the same context as last week's sermon in regards to what preceded this event. Jesus had been betrayed by Judas' kiss of death in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was arrested by the Romans and taken to be tried in front of the Sanhedrin, which was a ruling body of 71 rabbis, the religious elite, including the high priest.

Here's the main thing I want you to remember for when we read our passage. Peter, one of Jesus' main disciples in his inner circle, was in the courtyard of Caiaphus, the high priest, while Jesus was being tried.

I want to read that narrative, but first I want to remind you that just before this scene Jesus had his last meal with his disciples where he told them that one of them would betray him, and as a matter of fact, he told them that every single one of them would desert him.

Peter, very adamantly, in front of all the other disciples, declared that even if everyone else deserted him, he would not. He said he was willing to die for Jesus. And then, Jesus broke the news to him that before

the rooster crowed the next morning, Peter would deny Jesus — not once, but three times. Keep that in mind as we read this.

[4]

Matthew 26:69–75 (NLT)

69 Meanwhile, Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant girl came over and said to him, “You were one of those with Jesus the Galilean.” 70 But Peter denied it in front of everyone. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said. 71 Later, out by the gate, another servant girl noticed him and said to those standing around, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.”

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72 Again Peter denied it, this time with an oath. “I don’t even know the man,” he said. 73 A little later some of the other bystanders came over to Peter and said, “You must be one of them; we can tell by your Galilean accent.”

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74 Peter swore, “A curse on me if I’m lying—I don’t know the man!” And immediately the rooster crowed. 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.

You have to wonder what Peter must have been going through emotionally during that whole scene. He obviously loved Jesus very much. He followed him to the trial and skulked around in the courtyard risking being found out. What was going through his mind when he denied Jesus the first time? I would imagine that he went there actually believing that he would die for Jesus. He had said that in front of all the other disciples, and I think he really believed he would.

Try to get into Peter’s head. I would imagine, before he was first pointed out by the servant girl, he was having a conversation in his mind. “Stay strong, Peter. Stay strong. I will not desert Jesus. Never. Even if everyone else does. I won’t.” And then as soon as he is confronted it’s, “Jesus who? Nope, never heard of him.”

I’ve had situations like that where I see someone walking towards me and I know they are going to criticize me about something. As they are getting closer to me I am having a conversation in my head. “Just relax, Jeff. Don’t get defensive. Calm down. It’s okay. Just ask some clarifying questions. You don’t need to defend yourself. Just learn from them. It’s okay. You don’t need to try and win an argument.” And then I’ll listen to them and I start to sweat, and my blood pressure begins to rise, and all the while I try to talk myself down. And then I interrupt the conversation I’m having with myself in my head and immediately defend myself. When I do that I feel like such a failure.

It doesn’t happen as much as it used to, but I still struggle with being defensive. Sometimes I fail. I am a work in progress. I am way less defensive than I was last year at this time and I am looking forward to being even less defensive a year from now.

So, Peter, I would imagine, was having a similar conversation in his mind. He was fully intending to devote himself completely to Jesus and yet three times he denied even knowing him.

74 Peter swore, “A curse on me if I’m lying—I don’t know the man!” And immediately the rooster crowed. 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.

He felt like a complete failure.

[7 - show the poll again]

Have you ever let someone down and felt like a failure? I think we likely all have.

After Jesus was tried by the Sanhedrin, he was put on trial in front of the Romans. They found him innocent, but the religious leaders put the pressure on Rome to crucify him anyway, which they reluctantly did. Jesus died on the cross. His friends prepared him for burial and placed him in a tomb where he laid for three days, dead, locked in with a huge stone rolled in front of the opening, guarded by Roman soldiers.

He rose from the dead and then appeared to his disciples several times over a period of forty days. The first time he appeared to Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus' most faithful and courageous disciples, and some other women. Mary Magdalene is actually mentioned in the Gospels more than most of the other disciples. She played a very important role in the ministry of Jesus.

[8 - title slide]

The second time he appeared to his followers they were all hiding out behind locked doors for fear that they would meet the same fate as he did. They were all extremely excited to see him, to say the least. Thomas wasn't with them at the time. He wouldn't believe the others when they told him they had seen Jesus alive. So, Jesus appeared to them again eight days later, and showed Thomas the nail scars in his hands and the hole in his side where he was pierced by the spear. That sealed the deal for Thomas and he responded, "My Lord and my God."

That takes us up to our passage for the day. Keep in mind the earlier scenario with Peter and his feelings of failure from denying Jesus.

[9]

John 21:1–19 (NLT)

¹ Later, Jesus appeared again to the disciples beside the Sea of Galilee. This is how it happened. ²Several of the disciples were there—Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples.

So, seven of the disciples were here in this situation. Among them was Peter. Keep in mind what they had all been through. It must have been surreal for them. Peter would still have been struggling with feelings of failure. They all probably were, because they had all deserted Jesus. Peter, however, would have felt it much more deeply. He stood out from the crowd because of his public declaration that he would follow Jesus to the cross and die for him, and then made his public trilogy of failures. If he was anything like me, he would have been still mulling it over in his mind. And I'm sure it would have been exhausting for him.

When I experience things like that I need to do something therapeutic for myself. I know others who need to do the same thing.

I'm going to call Derek up for a minute. Jenn, Derek's wife, who is our administrator, told the staff about how Derek experienced preaching here the last time and what he did for therapy post sermon.

So, back to Peter. Seven of the disciples were hanging out at the lake, the Sea of Galilee. Their minds were reeling. They had no idea what their future would hold. So much had happened over the last few days.

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³ Simon Peter said, "I'm going fishing." "We'll come, too," they all said.

I love that. They all needed some therapy.

So they went out in the boat, but they caught nothing all night.

[11]

⁴ At dawn Jesus was standing on the beach, but the disciples couldn't see who he was. ⁵ He called out, "Fellows, have you caught any fish?" "No," they replied. ⁶Then he said, "Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you'll get some!" So they did, and they couldn't haul in the net because there were so many fish in it.

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7 Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, “It’s the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his tunic (for he had stripped for work), jumped into the water, and headed to shore. 8 The others stayed with the boat and pulled the loaded net to the shore, for they were only about a hundred yards from shore.

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9 When they got there, they found breakfast waiting for them—fish cooking over a charcoal fire, and some bread. 10 “Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught,” Jesus said. 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore. There were 153 large fish, and yet the net hadn’t torn.

[14]

12 “Now come and have some breakfast!” Jesus said. None of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. 13 Then Jesus served them the bread and the fish. 14 This was the third time Jesus had appeared to his disciples since he had been raised from the dead.

This is such a great heart warming story. Once they are finished breakfast, Jesus moved towards Peter. He knew what Peter was going through. He knew the shame he was feeling. He didn’t shun him. He moved towards him. Look what happens.

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15 After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John,

Remember, Jesus gave Simon his nickname Peter, which means “the Rock” in Greek. He doesn’t call him Peter here. He calls him Simon, son of John. We’re not sure why, but likely to let Peter know that they are going to have a serious heart to heart conversation.

“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

We have to guess what Jesus meant when he asked this question. Do you love me more than what? More than your fishing career? More than you love the other disciples? I think more likely what he is asking is “Peter, do you really love me more than these other disciples do?” Remember, Peter had a tendency of boasting that he was more faithful to Jesus than his buddies were.

Jesus wasn’t trying to shame Peter. He was using this as an opportunity for him to grow. There is a Proverb in the Old Testament that says,

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Proverbs 27:6 (NLT)

6 Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.

So, Jesus was helping Peter see his true heart because it was his heart that had been damaging his relationships. He had a huge blind spot and Jesus loved him enough to help him see it.

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“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

The Greek language has many more verbs that mean love than English does.

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The word used here is the Greek word for ‘unconditional love’. ***“Simon, son of John, do you agapao me?”***

Do you really love me unconditionally? Do you really love me more than these other disciples do. Again, Jesus is not trying to shame him. He is helping him face reality so he can grow. He’s helping him see a blindspot that is hurting his relationships.

In order for any of us to grow we need to face the fact that we are not where we should be in regards to our capacity to love others. None of us in this room fully loves anybody unconditionally. We need to know that we have a long way to go if we are going to grow. Jesus wants to help us all face that hard fact so we can grow more in how we love others.

Peter answered Jesus.

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“Yes, Lord,” Peter replied, “you know I love you.”

“Yes Lord, you know I phileo you.” *Phileo* is the Greek word for friendship love. “Yes, Lord, you know I love you like a friend.”

Peter is not as confident as he was before he disowned Christ. He is faced with the painful fact that he really was not as far along as he thought he was.

How many of you have ever been faced with blind spots? How does it feel? I have experienced it many times. In my younger days, I had so many blind spots I could barely see straight. I still have them. We all do.

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And in order to grow we need to give permission to people we trust, and who love us, to help us see our blind spots. If we are serious about growing in our relationships this is critical.

Peter is starting to wake up to where he is really at. “I’m not sure if I love you unconditionally, but I love you as a friend. You know that.”

“Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him.

This is key. Not only does Jesus not shame Peter. He actually gives him a job to do. Teach others to love just like I have taught you.

Every single one of us has let others down. We have failed. There is nobody here who is immune to failure. How many movies have we seen where someone says something, “Men, failure is not an option.”

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The truth is that in life there is always a very good possibility of failure. We have to know it’s okay, otherwise our growth will be stunted.

Jesus does the same thing to us as he did to Peter. He reaches down and gives us a hand up and says, “Learn from your mistakes and then teach others.”

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Make sure when you fail that you fail forward. Make it a successful failure.

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¹⁶ Jesus repeated the question: “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Jesus repeats the question. Do you *agapao* me? Do you love me unconditionally?

“Yes, Lord,” Peter said, “you know I love you.”

“Yes, Lord. You know I *phileo* you.” “I love you like a friend.”

“Then take care of my sheep,” Jesus said.

Again, learn from your mistakes and teach others to do the same.

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17 A third time he asked him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

The third time Jesus changes the question, and we don't really know why.

“Simon, son of John, do you phileo me?” “Do you love me as a friend?”

Peter was obviously very hurt by this line of questioning from his Lord. John says that Peter was grieved.

“You know that I am fond of you. I feel love for you, but would I die for you? I don't know.”

Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love [phileo] you.” Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep.

Jesus continues his lesson with Peter.

[25]

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.”

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19 Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death he would glorify God. Then Jesus told him, “Follow me.”

Jesus goes on to tell Peter that he would in fact die for him. He hinted at the kind of death that would befall him, arms stretched out, carried away by others against his will. And then Jesus says, **“Follow me.”**

About ten years later Peter was arrested. Just prior to this James, the brother of Jesus, had been arrested and beheaded. There was an increasing intolerance of this new sect called The Way, or the Christians. Peter was in jail chained to a guard so that he couldn't escape. Outside the jail cell in homes all throughout Jerusalem and beyond, Christians committed themselves to praying for Peter in prison.

That night an angel appeared and miraculously rescued Peter. Shortly after that King Herod died and Peter remained in Jerusalem as the leader of the church, where he took care of Jesus' people – his sheep.

Fast forward about twenty years. The Christian historian Hegesippus, from the second century tells us that Peter eventually travelled to Rome to minister to the Christians there. The emperor Nero was determined to have him executed. His fellow Christians urged him to flee. But, he returned to the city and was captured shortly thereafter and sentenced to be crucified.

He told his captors that he was not worthy to die in the same position as his Saviour and requested to be crucified upside down. The Romans honoured his request.

Prior to his death, thirty years after he denied Jesus, Peter wrote two letters that are in the New Testament, 1 and 2 Peter. Read these two letters and you can see how much Peter had changed. Peter had failed Jesus and the other disciples when he denied Jesus, but he didn't let his failure keep him from growing. He learned from his failure and failed forward.

Growth is painful. It always is. We cannot grow without pain. You've heard the saying, “No pain, no gain.” It's true. I wish it wasn't, but it is.

I don't know about you, but I hate pain. I try to avoid it. That is only natural. It's not normal to seek out pain. That said, we cannot escape pain in our lives. We all experience it. We all experience the pain of failure. It is a part of life that is inescapable. That means we need to make sure to make the best use of our pain and

our failures by how we respond to them because depending on how we respond, we will either grow in maturity or we will grow hard and brittle.

We can choose to learn from our failures and pain. We can keep reminding ourselves that it is a normal part of life on earth, and learn to get more comfortable with being uncomfortable, and learn from Jesus. Or conversely, we can pretend that we can somehow escape problems, pain, and failures and think that we can only be happy once we are free from them.

The choice is ours. We can choose life and use every pain, and each failure as an opportunity to grow, or we can give up in despair or get hard hearted.

Remember Judas? He betrayed Jesus which led to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Judas also felt the pain of his failure. How did he respond? He went out and hung himself.

Peter also failed Jesus. He responded differently. He allowed Jesus to show him his blind spots. He received healing and used his failure as an opportunity to grow.

So, here's the lesson for us all when we fail.

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We need to know that:

1. **Failure is normal - own it.**

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2. **See failure as an opportunity to learn and grow.**

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3. **Don't let shame drive you into hiding or isolation.**

[30]

4. **Stay humble and learn from Jesus.**

[31]

5. **Choose life.**

I want to close with these proverbs.

Proverbs 15:31–32 (NLT)

³¹ If you listen to constructive criticism, you will be at home among the wise. ³² If you reject discipline, you only harm yourself; but if you listen to correction, you grow in understanding.



***Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
Failing Forward***

John 21:1-19

Week of September 23, 2018

Objective of this study: To learn to okay with failure and use it as an opportunity to learn from Jesus.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us.]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 30:1-5** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything “jump out at you”?**

Welcome (5 minutes)

How was your summer?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word (30-45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75.
 1. Chart Peter's emotional state as this story progresses. What was he feeling at each stage?
3. Read John 21:1-19.
 1. Think about the previous narrative in Matthew and Peter's emotional states there. How is Jesus helping him change in this narrative in John?
 2. How did Jesus deal with Peter's feeling of shame?

Work (30-45 minutes)

1. Think of times when you've been faced with something to learn, a blind spot, or a failure. How did you feel? How were you tempted to respond? How did you respond? What did you learn?
2. Read Proverbs 15 and find the verses that relate to this topic. What stands out for you personally and why?
3. What are you taking home this week? What changes in mindset or practice do you sense the Holy Spirit prompting you to make?

Prayer

1. Spend the rest of the time praying for each other. **Praise God together for how he works, and how he allows us to partner with him to accomplish things in his kingdom.**
2. Here are some things you can pray about for the church:
 - A. That, as a church, we would actively and purposefully engage in the mission of Jesus in Campbell River.
 - B. The decision about how to partner in the **Radiant Life** ministry with other churches in town.
 - C. Our church board and staff as they lead us to live out the mission of Jesus

D. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.

E. **Our missionary of the week:** Brody and Allison Naknakim - NAIM Ministries

F. **Local CR church:** Gateway Foursquare Church - Pastor Matt and Deanna Delblanc