

Making a Comeback After a Setback

John 21:1-22

Good morning! Nice to be back after a three-week sabbatical. God forced me to take a sabbatical. Been here in the church for 12 years and never took a break except for an occasional vacation, one week or two weeks. I'm glad a couple of our teachers stepped up while I was away, sharing with you God's message. I'm glad a home group worked together to make sure you were well-fed during the Worship at the Park. I'm glad our directors held down the fort while I was away, making sure everyone was towing the line. To think that Tita Nelly was out as well, one or two weeks?

I'm sure many of you are glad I took a forced sabbatical. You need it, pastor. Some of you are perhaps even more glad I took a sabbatical. We need it, pastor. Can you do it more often?

As you know, we started a series called "Reaching Out" and I talked about kindness and how we can express it through Servant Evangelism. Then, we had to take a break because of my extended vacation and today, we're extending that break further because I'd like to share a message about what to do after you suffered a setback. What happened to me was a setback. Because I wasn't healthy, it affected my work, my ministry, even my family.

All of us suffer setbacks, right? Maybe a financial setback, a relationship setback, a healthy setback, a ministry setback, a career setback, name it. No one is immune. I remember when I was starting out as a computer programmer and I was one of those undergoing computer training at the Development Bank of the Philippines in Makati. That was a long, long time ago, in the mid-80's. We were about 20 and we developed a camaraderie.

Then, at lunchtime, one of my co-trainees was feeling down and depressed because she was having a hard time in the training. She thought she wouldn't make it. So, to sort of encourage her, I said, "Hey, don't be so sad. It's not the end of the world. It's just the end of your career." And she punched me. No, she didn't do that. They all laughed actually. Sometimes, as they say, laughter is the best medicine. She made it, btw.

Seriously, when you suffer a setback, it could feel like it's the end of the world. Just ask a girl who just broke up with her boyfriend. Or a man who lost his job suddenly. Setbacks are not pleasant. They hurt, they inflict pain. Some of you, even as you're listening now, perhaps, just experienced a setback or you're going through a setback. And you wonder how to recover from your setback. My friend, there is a way. As the great theologian Don Moen said, "God will make a way, where there seems to be no way."

Have you heard of Jack Kilby? Jack Kilby could have let a setback stop him, but he didn't. MIT turned down Jack Kilby's application for admission because his Math scores were too low. As a result, Kilby never received much training in physics and didn't get the education he desired. But on December 10, 2000, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences gave him the Nobel Prize in physics.

Why? Well, he only invented something that has probably changed your life and has definitely changed history—the microchip. Kilby is also the co-inventor of the handheld calculator and has patents for several other inventions.

So, this morning, I'd like to talk about "Making a Comeback After a Setback". And this morning, I'd like to look at the story in the Bible of one guy who suffered a terrible, terrible setback. Then, he was able to make a comeback, with the help of God, of course.

We'll look at the story of Peter, the disciple of Jesus.

Now, Peter, is not the original name of Peter. It was Simon. But when Jesus met him through his brother Andrew, he said to Peter, ““You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which, when translated, is Peter)” (John 1:42).

Cephas is Aramaic and Peter is Greek. So, Jesus was actually talking to Simon in Aramaic. Both names mean the same, “stone” or “rock”. Jesus saw the potential of Simon. He could become a great leader of the church. Peter was strong-willed and strong-minded. Traits that would be needed by a leader of the early church. As we know, however, Peter was not rock-solid in the beginning. He made mistakes. He committed errors. He failed in some things. He was as human and ordinary like us. One time Jesus rebuked him because he put his foot in his mouth. In Matt. 16:23, it says, “Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” That was after Jesus said that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life and Peter said, “Never, Lord...this shall never happen to you!” (Matt. 16:22). Jesus was saying, “Peter, your agenda is like the agenda of Satan. The devil doesn’t want me to die because my death will bring salvation to mankind.” So, Jesus had to correct him.

Sometimes, Jesus has to do that with us. He corrects us. When our agenda doesn’t align with God’s agenda, he does something so that we see the wrong direction we’re taking. We don’t know whether Peter felt bad, the Bible doesn’t tell us, but I guess that’s how he must have felt. He must have felt embarrassed. He must have felt like a failure because he wasn’t thinking the way Jesus was thinking. But he was able to recover soon after that.

Until the night when Jesus was arrested. We all know the story. Peter, being brave and defiant, followed Jesus as he was led away by his captors to be tried in their court. Then, while waiting outside, he was spotted by two people who said that he was a follower of Jesus. He denied these.

Then, on his third denial, and the Bible says, he even cursed, **Matth. 26:74-75** says, “Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know the man!’ Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: ‘Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.”

That last word, bitterly, interestingly, is the same word used by almost all Bible versions. Two other versions tried to capture the sense of bitterness Peter felt when they translated it “**Uncontrollably**” (CEB) and “**and cried and cried and cried**” (MSG). You know, that is what really must have happened to him that night. He must have cried the whole night. He must have cried until the morning. He was so filled with remorse and regret. The word in Greek for bitterly suggests a convulsion, like your whole body is shaking violently because of the pain you’re feeling. In fact, the Greek root word “pikros” connotes being pierced. For sure, Peter’s heart was pierced by the realization of his sin. He denied Jesus, not once, but three times. It was a colossal failure. A huge setback.

He might have felt really devastated especially because his master was put to death on a cross. And he together with the other apostles, except John, left and were scattered. He didn’t know what to do. He might have wondered what the future held for him. Would he be able to stage a comeback? Will he be able to overcome his misery?

We know he did, the Bible tells us. In fact, the Bible is full of stories of people like him who were in the dumps and then lifted up. And it was God who actually staged the comeback because he is the God of the Comeback. God says, “**I will never leave you nor forsake you.**” (Hebrews 13:5 ESV)

In the remainder of our time, I just want to show you how Peter was able to make a comeback with the help of God.

There are three things I want to share with you in this chapter we're looking at. Whatever setback you're experiencing in your life or if you suffer a setback, do these three things:

1. Reach Out to Jesus because he is reaching out to you.

Let's look at verse 4 and following. (Read from verse 4 then show the below slide when it reaches verse 7) "Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water."

Note that Jesus was waiting on the shore, watching his disciples. He even talked to them and they didn't recognize him. Why didn't they recognize him? Perhaps because he now has a glorified body after his resurrection and his physical features were transformed as some would say. But the simple answer is that Jesus was 100 yards away from them, about the length of a football field. In any case, what I want you to see is that Jesus was watching over Peter. In the same way, he watches over you. He is always there in your struggles. He knows what you're going through and he wants to help you. He is watching and waiting. In fact, he makes the first move. He lets you know that he is around. Like when he started the conversation with his disciples. "Friends, haven't you any fish?" The problem is, Peter and the disciples were so focused on their own selves that they lost sight of Jesus. They weren't expecting him at all. That could be our problem, too. When we fail, when we experience an obstacle in life, when we suffer a setback, we're prone to self-pity. We worry. We get unsettled. We focus on ourselves. We lose sight of Jesus. The fact is, he is just waiting for you to reach out to him. He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

It seems like Peter couldn't find rest. He was restless. Now, you see, prior to this, Jesus had already showed himself to Peter and the other disciples after his resurrection, but it wasn't enough to make Peter feel confident again about his relationship with Jesus. At this point, I think Peter wasn't really sure whether he was forgiven by Jesus already. He wasn't sure whether Jesus had accepted him back. Maybe, he thought that he wasn't the rock that Jesus thought he would be. He failed Jesus big time.

In verse 2, for example, we see Peter and a few other disciples had gone fishing. It's interesting that it seems he forgot his primary calling which was to fish for men. Now, he went back to his old vocation of fishing for fish, and he brought the other disciples with him. Misery loves company, you know.

Then, in verse 3, it says, "They caught nothing". They failed to catch fish because they did it without Jesus. They relied on themselves, not on Jesus. Until Jesus reached out to them and said "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." (v. 6) They did find some. The net was full of fish! Suddenly they realized it was a miracle and they knew only Jesus could do that kind of miracle. Their eyes were opened. And Peter jumped out of the boat and into the water, eager to meet Jesus.

Finally, he came face to face with Jesus. He acknowledged the presence of Jesus. It was the beginning of his restoration.

Folks, know that setbacks are a fact of life. It is because we are living in an imperfect world and we are imperfect people. It is inevitable that we'll make mistakes, or people will hurt us, or we'll catch a disease, or we get rejected, or we commit a big blunder, or we fall into a grave sin. Whatever it is, God is the same. He loves you the same. He says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness." (Jer. 31:3). His love for you knows no bounds. It's unconditional.

It doesn't depend on whether you're a good person or not. If you're a follower of Jesus, you can always rely on his love for you. If you're not, later on, I'll share with you how you can be a follower.

So, Jesus is watching and waiting for you. He is reaching out to you. When you're in trouble, reach out to him.

Now, the second thing to do to make a comeback is to

2. Recognize that Jesus can put things back in order because he is a God of Order.

I read the story of this boy who received a wonderful gift of a model airplane from his uncle on Christmas day. So, he called his dad to help him assemble the plane. They worked on it side by side. The boy eagerly put the little parts of the plane together as he paid close attention to his dad's instructions. They were working on it for 15 minutes when suddenly, the phone rang. His dad stood up to answer the phone in the kitchen. Before he left, he told his boy to not do anything till he came back.

Minutes passed and the boy waited and just sat on the floor looking at the unassembled plane. His dad was taking long on the phone, however, and the boy became impatient. He was just so eager to see the plane assembled already. So, he began to pick up one piece and another piece and another piece and tried to put them together. Then, he noticed it wasn't right so he took one out on this side and took another one out on another side and then put one piece on this side and another piece on the other side. Then, he got lost. It didn't look like a plane anymore. He realized he was making a mess already. He became afraid and he cried.

Just then, his father came back and looked at the plane and then at him. The boy cried some more, scared of his dad. His dad sat beside him and smiled.

He assured him that he was not going to be punished and that they will continue to finish the work they started. So, his dad re-arranged the pieces, put them where they belong and cleaned up his mess.

Folks, Jesus is like that dad who can put things back in order. He specializes in fixing broken things. That's why he came to this world. He is God who became man because no one else can save us from our brokenness.

This brokenness is manifested in the way we live our lives, in our relationships with other people, in our behavior, in our way of thinking. We have problems emotionally, mentally, spiritually, because of our broken selves. But what caused this brokenness? It is sin. Sin is anything we do, say, and think that displeases God. We inherited this from our first parents, Adam and Eve. They were created by God as perfect human beings. But God gave them free will. They could choose whether to follow God or not. They chose the latter. They rebelled against God and became broken as a result. They passed this on to their descendants. Because if you have a broken mold, wouldn't anything that goes into that mold be broken, too?

So, God became man in the person of Jesus to fix us. He died on the cross for our sins. If he didn't come, we would still be languishing in our sins, condemned to die and be separated from God forever.

Now, as we read verse 15 and following, we see how Jesus put things back together in Peter's life. Let me read verse 15 and following.

Notice that in this conversation, Jesus called Peter, Simon son of John, not Peter. Why is that? It is because Jesus was in the process of restoring Peter to his ministry. Remember that Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter with the view of turning him into a rock like Jesus who would firmly and decisively lead the followers of Jesus. But because of Peter's denial of Jesus, that has been put to doubt. Not in Jesus' mind, but in Peter's.

So now, Jesus is starting all over with him, addressing him as Simon, in order to make him realize that Jesus is giving him a second chance. Folks, you must realize this, Jesus is the God of the comeback, the God of second chances.

So, we see that in this conversation, Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” And each time after Peter responds with “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you”, Jesus says, “Feed my sheep” or “Take care of my sheep.”

Now, in the Bible, as you know, whenever a word or a phrase is repeated three times, it is there for emphasis, right? So, it seems like Jesus was trying plumb the depths of Peter’s love for Jesus, not for Jesus’ sake, but for Peter’s sake. Jesus already knew what was in the heart of Peter. But does Peter know what was in his heart?

So, with each question, “Do you love me?”, Peter is forced to examine his heart. Peter knows by now that Jesus has forgiven him. But is his love for Jesus now truly solid? Will he go to great lengths to obey Jesus? Caring for his sheep is a tall order, will he commit to doing it? When Jesus asked him the third time he was hurt. I guess you would be hurt, too, when someone repeatedly asks you a question like they don’t trust you.

Peter was hurt for a moment but I’m sure he realized that it was Jesus’s way to let him know that Jesus wanted to restore him in his position as the leader of the church.

I know we’ve heard many sermons about this exchange between Jesus and Peter. But the overall picture I want us to see is that whatever we have done, or whatever trouble we’re in, Jesus can take care of our situation. It seems hopeless and senseless, but Jesus is able to put things back in order. **Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”**

Finally, to be able to make a comeback, you need to

3. Refocus your eyes on Jesus as you follow because there will always be distractions.

In verse 19, Jesus says to Peter, “Follow me!” Then, as soon as he says that, Peter turns around, sees the disciple whom Jesus loved who is John, and asks, “Lord, what about him?”

Peter easily gets distracted that’s why he stumbles as he follows Jesus. I just find this amusing because Jesus just tried to make Peter focus on him by asking him three serious questions and then, his mind wanders to something else or someone else. Peter is a comic character.

But, who am I to say this when I myself am a comic character? Early in my life, God called me to serve him. And I was serving and was active but got distracted. I was distracted by my career, by false religions, and by girls. Until the right one came along and no more distractions. She guards me tightly like Draymond Green.

Distractions are everywhere. So many Christians have fallen because of distractions – money, sex, false teachings, what-have-you. We hear of famous Christian personalities saying they are deconstructing their faith, meaning they are leaving Christianity or turning away from God. Although many of them I would say are really “backsliding” which is an old term for “deconstructing”, I think. Been there, done that. Usually, people turn away from God because of frustration and disappointments with God. I was on that boat before. When I suffered personal setbacks after I became a Christian, I thought God didn’t care for me. I thought he was too far and was not interested in what I was going through. For years and years, I didn’t want to do anything with Christianity, with God, with Jesus. I was fed up. I became an agnostic and then an atheist. Even became an alcoholic for a time especially in my early 20’s. Basically, I was lost. I knew I was lost but didn’t know the way back.

Until God started to reach out to me. Through dreams, visions, circumstances, and, of course, his Word. And, I never told anyone here before, one day, in Australia, alone in my apartment, God pinned me down on the floor. I was in a fetal position, I was crying, actually I was sobbing uncontrollably, and I felt like a big hand was holding me down and I couldn't get up. And I asked, "Lord, what is happening?" Then, he said, "Because you rejected my Son Jesus for a long time". Then, I realized how far away I have turned from Jesus. And I asked God for forgiveness and I knew he had forgiven me, but strangely, I was still crying and I still couldn't get up, and I asked God, "Lord, what should I do?" Then, there was silence. I received no impressions from God. What happened next was I heard myself saying repeatedly, "Lord, I'll follow you wherever you lead, Lord, I'll follow you wherever you lead." I kept saying those words until my tears subsided. And then, that big hand lifted and I was able to stand.

When Jesus reached out to me, I reached out to him. Then, I recognized that he could put things back in order in my life. In fact, after that experience, God called me to YWAM to train as a missionary, then, soon after called me to enroll in Bible school and afterwards called me to pastor. I know there will always be distractions as I follow Jesus but I try to refocus always on him, trusting that he will come through always. Because of my experience in the past, I have to deal with panic attacks every now and then. That is a distraction. But when it comes, I refocus on Jesus. I'm like Peter in verse 21, "When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" "Lord, what about my panic attack?" Jesus answered Peter, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." "If I want that panic attack to be there until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

Yes I will follow Jesus because I know he is faithful. He says, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)