



LifeGroups

GROWING TOGETHER IN THE GOSPEL

Life Group Growth Sheet

“Do You Love Me?”

John 21:15-19

Where We’ve Been in our “Encounters with God” Series

We are nearing the end of our sermon series entitled, “Encounters with God: Stories of Grace Overcoming Guilt.” Throughout this series, we have studied episodes in the lives of individuals in which God met and spoke with them. Three recurring themes have emerged from our study. When God confronts people he (1) shows himself for who he is, (2) allows people to see themselves for who they are, and (3) extends his grace to them.

Since Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God (John 1:1; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Hebrews 1:1-3), each of these encounters with God points to Jesus Christ and what he has done for us. Only in Christ can we see God for who he is (both holy and loving) and ourselves for who we are (sinful but loved). Only in Christ, moreover, does God extend his grace to us. Therefore, studying these encounters with God serves to humble us, heighten our joy, and fix our affections on Christ.

“Do You Love Me?”

What happens when you do something so bad that you never believed you would actually do it? Or when you keep doing something you never thought you would keep doing? This is what happened to the Apostle Peter when he found himself denying that he had ever known Jesus.

Most people know that feeling of misery after a failure. But often we don’t know how to get back up—or whether we ever will.

In this episode in Peter’s life, we see how Jesus dealt with Peter’s failure. There are three parts to our study of this episode: 1) how Peter fell (Matthew 26:30-32, 69-75), 2) what he learned, and 3) how he was restored (John 21:15-19).

1. **How Peter fell.** Peter’s fall was preceded by pride and unbelief. His pride blinded him to his own weakness, and his unbelief kept him from understanding what Jesus was doing for him.
2. **What Peter learned.** Peter learned that he was more sinful than he had imagined. Whereas he insisted that he would never deny Jesus—even comparing the strength of *his* resolve with the other disciples’—he would come to realize that his “strength” was his worst enemy.
3. **How Peter was restored.** Jesus’ restoring of Peter is an astonishing, counterintuitive act of grace. Instead of rebuking him, Jesus gives Peter an opportunity to reaffirm his love for Jesus, and in the process, he continues to unravel Peter’s self-assertiveness. Instead of removing him from leadership, Jesus commissions him to care for the church. Finally, instead of rejecting him as a disciple, he invites him—once again—to follow him.

Through Jesus’ commissioning of Peter, we also learn three important lessons about spiritual leadership.



- *Spiritual leaders are motivated by love for Jesus.* Although truly effective leaders must love the ones they lead, this love will wither unless it is rooted in love for Jesus. This is why Jesus' question, "Do you love me?" preceded his command to tend his "sheep" (John 21:15-17).
- *Spiritual leaders lead from a personal experience of being forgiven by Jesus.* Peter knew by experience what it meant to be forgiven and restored to usefulness. He knew by experience the meaning of "the tested genuineness of your faith" (1 Peter 1:7). Leaders who fail to see either the seriousness of sin or the reality of forgiveness will tend to trivialize sin (be overly lenient) or focus on others' wrongs (be too harsh).
- *Spiritual leaders prioritize following Jesus.* Even after commissioning Peter to "feed my sheep," Jesus reminded him of the call that started it all: "Follow me" (John 21:19). No matter how great one's influence, a spiritual leader guards the fundamental priority of following Jesus. Even if no one else follows, that, in the end, is all that truly matters.

Discussion & Application

1. Share a time in your life—it could be light and humorous—when "pride went before a fall." If you could travel back in time and talk to yourself *before* the failure, what would you say?
2. Jesus directly foretold Peter's failure, yet Peter apparently refused to believe it was possible. He proudly insisted, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away" (Matthew 26:33). What does this tell us about the nature of *pride*?
3. To "cope" after a failure, people tend to either 1) trivialize the failure ("It wasn't that bad."), or 2) focus on the failure ("I can't believe I did that!"). Describe the attitudes and emotions of a person who takes either approach.
4. When Christ deals with Peter after his failure, he shows that Peter has been forgiven. True forgiveness takes into account the full seriousness of the offense, while at the same time frees the forgiven person from the guilt of that sin. Describe the attitudes and emotions of a person who understands true forgiveness. How do they feel about the sin? How do they feel about Jesus as the one who forgave them?
5. Why is it important for a person to lead from a personal experience of forgiveness? How would your influence on others—your words, attitudes, and actions—be different if you spoke, thought, and acted out of the conviction that you have been forgiven?