

BROKEN VESSELS



What is broken will be restored.

Brokenness and pain.

Unfortunately, both are universal in our experiences as human beings. We may have been hurt by a love that ended prematurely, by abandonment and isolation, by chronic illness or death, or by circumstances we bring on ourselves through our sin and failure—but we all know what pain feels like. It feels like something has been broken inside us. It feels like *we* are broken.

Like clay jars, we're fragile. We can be easily broken—but we don't have to remain "broken vessels." We're never beyond the healing and redeeming power of God. In the face of failure, God responds with restoration. In spite of our shortcomings, God will work in and through us. In the midst of our circumstances, God will help us endure.

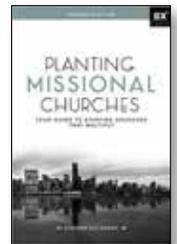
Yet God doesn't stop there! He uses us to speak into the lives of other "broken vessels." He uses our experiences with His grace and power to comfort others. He desires to use us to help our neighbors and loved ones encounter the God who brings hope and restoration.

"Now we have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7). We are broken vessels, but this great treasure—the good news of Jesus Christ—shines through our brokenness. And that's a truth worth celebrating.



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Broken Vessels

Session 1 **A Fresh Start** *John 18:15-18,25-27; 21:15-19*

Session 2 **Objections Overruled** *Exodus 3:11-12; 4:10-17*

Session 3 **The Gift of Grace** *2 Corinthians 12:2-10*

Session 4 **A Channel of Comfort** *2 Corinthians 1:2-7*

Session 5 **A Passion to Share the Gospel** *2 Corinthians 5:11,14-21*

Session 6 **Right Here, Right Now** *Mark 5:1-2,8-15,18-20*

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A FRESH START



When have you really enjoyed making a mess?

QUESTION #1

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BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE **81**

THE POINT

We fail; Jesus restores.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Making a mess in the kitchen is one thing. Making a mess of life is quite another. I can clean the kitchen to the point you'd never know I was in there. But when I make a mess of my life, I can't just wipe away the evidence—or the consequences.

Have you ever found yourself at rock bottom? It may have been because of an inappropriate relationship, a string of lies, or a temptation or habit that seemed to gradually take over everything in life. At that moment, you stand at a crossroad. Do you continue down the road you're on, continuing to repeat the mistakes because the pain of changing seems greater than the pain of remaining the same? Or do you look to Jesus for a way out?

Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, knew what it meant to mess up. He failed in a big way. But Peter's story also offers us encouragement and points us to the way out—a fresh start in Jesus Christ.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

John 18:15-18,25-27

¹⁵ Simon Peter was following Jesus, as was another disciple. That disciple was an acquaintance of the high priest; so he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard. ¹⁶ But Peter remained standing outside by the door. So the other disciple, the one known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the girl who was the doorkeeper and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ Then the servant girl who was the doorkeeper said to Peter, "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" "I am not," he said. ¹⁸ Now the servants and the officials had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold. They were standing there warming themselves, and Peter was standing with them, warming himself. ... ²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." ²⁶ One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" ²⁷ Peter denied it again. Immediately a rooster crowed.

Peter had been through a lot on this particular evening: the last supper, failing Jesus by falling asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane, witnessing Judas' betrayal, fighting the temple guards, and watching Jesus allow Himself to be arrested and taken away. None of these events excuse Peter's denials, but they do help us recognize that he was surely exhausted and confused. His whole world had been turned upside down. Still, after all the disciples initially ran away from Jesus' arrest (see Matt. 26:55), Peter at least made an effort to get near enough to see and hear what was going on—as long as he could do it undetected.

"The other disciple," who is generally acknowledged to be John, was able to follow Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. Peter stayed outside. Being neither a slave nor a member of the temple police, he must have stood out like a sore thumb. Not surprisingly, people immediately began connecting him with Jesus' followers—and that's when the denials started.

What emotions would you have experienced in Peter's situation?

QUESTION #2

The Gospel of Luke adds another detail after the rooster's famous crow: "Then the Lord turned and looked at Peter. So Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61-62).

Many times we tend to see the men and women in Scripture as "bigger than life." Their encounters with God and their victories seem so far beyond what we experience today. We may view their failures as equally above our own—and more catastrophic. Consequently, we might be tempted to say: "I would never fail Jesus like that."

In fact, that's just what Peter said earlier that night. When Jesus shared one last meal with His disciples, He predicted Judas's betrayal. When Peter declared that he would lay down his life for Jesus, the Lord predicted that he also would betray Him (see John 13:37-38). This no doubt came as a shock to Peter. After all, he alone had walked on water with Jesus, and he was the first of the disciples to confess, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Thus, Peter responded like many of us surely would: "I will never deny you!" (Matt. 26:35).

Maybe we're not so different from Peter after all. We've all been in circumstances where we gave in to fear or succumbed to the crowd. We may not have denied Jesus as overtly as Peter did, but we've had our own moments when we tried to hide our relationship with Him.

We've denied Him through our words and our actions. And whenever we choose to sin, we're denying once again the One we say is Lord over our lives. Somewhere along the way, a rooster crows, and we're hit with the full force of our denial.

When that happens to you—not if, but when—what do you do? What happens after you fail? Do you write yourself off as a failure? Do you just try to get on with your life as if nothing happened?

We'll see from the life of Peter that a far better option awaits.

What factors may cause us to shrink back from identifying with Christ?

QUESTION #3

WHEN I FAIL

How do you typically respond after a failure or big mistake? Check the statement (or statements) that apply, or write out your own.

When I fail...

- I get angry.
- I become depressed.
- I don't let it bother me.
- I try to make sure no one saw what happened.
- I try to learn from what happened.
- Other:

How has your relationship with Jesus helped you move on from failure in the past?

"There is more grace in God's heart
than there is sin in your past."

— ERWIN LUTZER

John 21:15-19

¹⁵ When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.” “Feed my lambs,” he told him. ¹⁶ A second time he asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.” “Shepherd my sheep,” he told him. ¹⁷ He asked him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved that he asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” “Feed my sheep,” Jesus said. ¹⁸ “Truly I tell you, when you were younger, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don’t want to go.” ¹⁹ He said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, “Follow me.”

What immediately stands out from this passage is the three times Jesus asked Peter the same question. Three times. That’s the same number of times Peter betrayed Jesus on the night of His arrest—the very moment when his allegiance would have mattered most.

What also stands out is that “love” is a key word in verses 15-19. Unfortunately, the deeper impact of this passage is lost to most modern readers because the English language has only one word for “love.” So, it seems like Jesus was asking Peter the same question three times. However, if we look at the original Greek, which has multiple words for love, we unearth a deeper interaction.

In the first two questions, Jesus used *agapao*—the deep, affectionate, and cherishing type of love that God has for Jesus and that Jesus has for us. Interestingly, Peter didn’t respond with that same word for love; instead, he used *phileo*, which refers to more of a brotherly, personal type of love. The second interaction followed the same pattern. Jesus asked, “Simon, son of John, do you *agapao* me?” But Peter answered, “you know that I *phileo* you.”



When have you seen God bring restoration to a seemingly hopeless situation?

QUESTION #4

In the third interaction, however, Jesus switched to *phileo*, the same version of love Peter had been using, which meant Peter was able to respond in kind.

Why didn't Peter echo Jesus' type of love? Perhaps he was feeling too guilty from his betrayal and felt unworthy to use the higher form of love, since he had not displayed it on the night of his denials. Or perhaps Peter intentionally used the more personable version of love, *phileo*, because he wanted to show Jesus how deeply repentant he was.

In either case, what matters most is that each time Jesus asked the question, He followed up with a commission: "Feed my lambs." "Shepherd my sheep." "Feed my sheep." Peter was a broken vessel, but the past was forgiven, and Jesus desired for Peter to move forward in ministry.

The beautiful thing about God is He doesn't simply offer forgiveness. He wants to restore, redeem, and renew our past, our hurts, and our failures. He takes the broken pieces of our lives and makes us whole.

- ▶ Marriages that seem beyond the point of repair can be renewed and the couple can experience a deeper love than ever before.
- ▶ Hearts broken through divorce can experience a restoration through God's grace and faithfulness.
- ▶ People dragged down by addictions can be renewed and move forward to live productive, Christ-honoring lives.

I like how the apostle Paul described this phenomenon: "He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 Cor. 1:4).

Whatever our past sins and failures—however we might have denied Christ—He forgives. He restores. And He chooses to work through us for His glory.

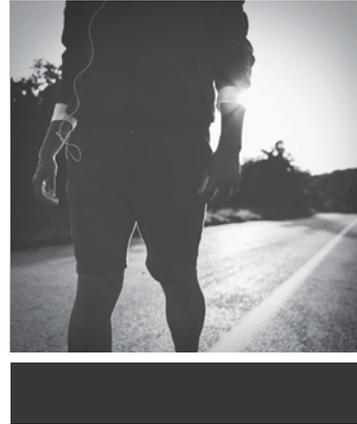
How can our group be a safe place that helps others experience restoration?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

We all fail as followers of Jesus, yet He restores. Consider these suggestions for living out that truth this week:

- ▶ **Remember.** Look back to a period of your life marked by sin. Thank God for His forgiveness and consider the ways that He has brought restoration to your life.
- ▶ **Memorize.** Memorize Psalm 139:23-24. Pray this on a regular basis to keep short accounts between yourself and God. And when a circumstance or sin arises in your life for which you need to ask God's forgiveness, do so.
- ▶ **Write.** Write a letter of forgiveness to someone who has hurt you. Whether or not you give this letter to the person, the writing process can help you express forgiveness and fully forgive that person just as Jesus has fully forgiven you.



Yes, you've messed up. But God's grace is so deep and His love is so wide that He will always restore you when you come to Him in repentance. Your sin—your denial of Jesus—is not the end of the road. Christ offers a fresh start.

My thoughts

Share with others how
you will live out this study:
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