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[Introductory video begins with board-game tokens moving around while Scrabble® tiles (letters) move together to spell out the words START SOMETHING. The scene changes to four wooden blocks lined up in the middle of a Monopoly board. As cello music begins, the hat game-token moves up onto the wooden blocks while the title, Ode from the Hat, is superimposed on the screen:]

[Hat game-token speaks with a British accent:] Ahem! *Ode From the Hat*, an original monologue with support from the Scrabble® dancers.

[Several Scrabble® pieces with their blank back-sides up, assemble on the game board in front of Hat and he continues:] Action! Alas, all these people—the masses—with their *Trivial Pursuits*. They have so many questions. Questions like: Why don't I have friends? *[Scrabble® tiles reassemble and raise up on end to display: WHY DONT I HAVE FIENDS]* Ahem, friends *[An R-tile inserts itself to correct the last word into FRIENDS]*...right. Does anyone really love me? *[Scrabble® tiles correctly assemble and display the question]* Will I ever get...?

[Blue car game-token interrupts by driving into the assembled Scrabble® tiles and crashing into the E-tile in GET, knocking it over:] Wahoo, we're going to *Candy Land (Candy Land)*. *[Blue car drives off.]*

[Hat:] Ahem! Will I ever get married? *[Scrabble® tiles correctly assemble and display the question]* And finally, will the...

[Two dice interrupt by moving through the Scrabble® tiles chanting:] —
Yahtzee! Yahtzee! Yahtzee! Yahtzee! Yahtzee! Yahtzee! Yahtzee! Yahtzee!

[Hat:] Ahem!! Will the...

[Dice coming back through a second time:] *Yahtzee—woo!—Yahtzee!*

[Hat, losing its cultured/British accent, speaks harshly:] Aw, forget it! We're talking about love this week, people.

[At video's end the series graphic superimposes over the scene; then Pastor Sal begins:]

I think the Hat has had it. Hey, have you ever said this?—I just didn't think it would turn out like this. Have you ever been disappointed by somebody? Have you ever had your heart burdened with disappointment and your spirit (just) crushed with the circumstances that other people have placed upon you? It might be in a—

- Marriage
- Your family
- Work
- Friends that you thought you had
- Maybe even in a church—

Maybe you have come here this morning because you're coming from a church where you've been disappointed. And because of that it's (kind of) knocked you off kilter. Or maybe you've seen some failures in your church and it's (kind of just) tainted you. And it's hard for you to get your spiritual

motor up and going again. You're trying the best that you can—you really are—but you're just going through the motions, because something deep down is dying inside of you.

That happens a lot. It happens to all of us. If it's not the disappointments because of other people, it's the disappointments because of ourselves—our own personal failures.

I guess of all the things that can happen to you, the worst thing is your own personal failures. I know my own personal failures, they're the worst things. (You know) whatever people do—well (you know), that comes and goes. But what I do: Man, how could I have done that?

- I'm really not worthy.
- I'm such a failure.
- I am a loser.

Everybody's going to fail and—

- The way that you handle your failure is going to really determine how much you enjoy your life here on this earth.
- How much you learn from your failure is going to determine how you can minister to others.

Now, if we're not careful, we can allow failures—

- To drive us into a hole (and if we're not careful)
- To drive us away from God—drive us away from the purpose that God has called us to in our lives.

Maybe you're here this morning, because you have failed and you're wondering:

- Does God love me even though I've committed this horrendous thing and I can't forgive myself and I can't get people to forgive me?
- Will God forgive me?
- Will God love me anyway in spite of what I've done and in light of what I've done?

All throughout the Bible, here's what you're going to find: that God's people are constantly disappointing one another—they are constantly failing—and if they're not careful, they'll allow those things to take them away from God's purpose in their lives. It even happens to churches. Sometimes churches get disappointed—

- Get disappointed in their pastor
- Get disappointed in their leadership
- Get disappointed in the direction of a church (and)

All of a sudden (because of that) they're off mission now and—

- There's confusion (and)
- There's hurt (and)
- There's pain (and)
- People leave and try to go somewhere else (and)
- Others from other churches go to another one

But there's never any real resolve inside of that.

- What church ought to be...isn't.
- What a Christian life ought to be...isn't either.

All throughout the Bible, you're going to find that that is one constant temptation—and that is one constant (over and over again), oft-repeated scenario because of the disappointments caused by other people or personal failures—it takes people away from God.

Well, this morning I want to talk to you about a kind of love that can overcome failure.

A NEW WAY OF LOVING:

1. LOVE THAT OVERCOMES FAILURE

One of my favorite people in the *New Testament* is Peter, because Peter has got so much passion and zeal and promises he'll do anything and everything and be the first to do it. And he's always the first to fail. As zealous as he is about his commitments, he is just as zealous in his failures. All through the *New Testament*—you follow the life of Peter (especially early on)—it's failure after failure after failure after failure.

- He says in one breath: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [*Matthew 16:15* (NIV)] About ten minutes later he's telling Jesus: I can't let You go to the cross. Jesus has got to rebuke Satan, who's speaking through him. [*Matthew 16:21-23* (summarized)]
- [He says:] (You know) I'm never going to be like these guys right there and run away from You, Lord! I'm going to defend You to the end. [*Luke 22:33* (paraphrased)]
- He falls asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane. [*Matthew 26:40; Mark 14:37*]
- He could walk on the water and he could sink like a rock, all within a matter of moments. [*Matthew 14:29-30*]

He had these great, great, great passionate expectations and sometimes he even hit [achieve] them. But most of the times he'd fall flat on his face. The worst one (the worst one) is when he stood up and he promised Jesus: All these disciples here, they may leave You—after Jesus said: Everyone of you are going to be scattered—Peter said: I'm not. [*Matthew 26:31-33; Mark 14:27-29* (summarized)]

Usually when Jesus tells you something's going to happen, it's not a good thing to argue with Him and tell Him the opposite. All right?

[Peter] said: Don't worry, Lord. You know I love You more than these people here. I am with You, Lord. That's what happens. He's warming himself by a charcoal fire—(kind of) distant after he had run away already—and watching Jesus. Three times they asked him—a little girl does—you're one of them. He says: No, no. Finally, he denies even knowing Jesus. About that time (just like Jesus said) a rooster crows. He's denied Jesus and he runs off into the night and he weeps. [*Luke 22:54-62* (paraphrased)] He wasn't there when He was crucified and he failed. (I mean) he's made so many promises and he has failed miserably. Peter was a failure, *but* Jesus comes to him. Jesus—through the kind of love that He has for us—restores him [and] brings him to a place where He wants Peter to do something for Him.

I think it's great. That gives me great hope that when we don't want to go to Jesus because of our failures, Jesus comes to us. Maybe you're here this morning and you can't even imagine going to Jesus because of your life. Or how could Jesus ever accept you? (I mean) does He not know the things that I've done?—exactly, He does. And He knew them before you did them.

He knew about Peter the moment Peter said: Lord, I'm never [going to deny You]; "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God." As soon as he said that, Jesus also knew there'd be a time he would be

denying Him. Jesus knew all of that and Jesus committed Himself to Peter—to love him no matter what.

That's now what Jesus is asking Peter: "Do you love me," Peter, no matter what? In *John 21*—

- He comes to Peter; they're out fishing
- He does a miracle for him
- He's in His resurrected state
- He brings him to the shore and He asks Peter three times the same question.

Verse 17:

The third time he said to him, "Simon, son of John {notice He didn't call him even Peter there}, do you love me?"...

John 21:17a (NIV)

Before you became that rock, Peter—that's [what] I'm going to build [My] church on—even when you were Simon, "do you love me?" I loved you back when you were Simon.

...Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

John 21:17b (NIV)

Man, coming to terms with failure and recommitting yourself again—maybe for the umpteenth time—is painful. The hurt comes when you truly admit the failure and begin to move beyond it. I am—by nature—my worst critic. Nobody can throw rocks at me as ably as I can throw rocks at myself. I can't tell you how many times I've said: That's stupid. Oh, I can't believe you did that. (I mean) this negative self-talk of how bad I am.

That's what Peter was doing. But Jesus—even after He was resurrected—remember He told them; He said: Tell my disciples—especially Peter—that I'm alive. (You know) it didn't make Peter really excited because he had to fess up; he had to come to terms with this failure.

The biggest thing that we do and—the most [hurtful]—the thing that hurts the most: not that you just did it, but coming to terms and telling the people that you did it. Or coming to God and [saying]: God, I can't believe that I blew this.

That's why he was hurt in his heart that Jesus asked him a third time: "Do you love me?" The most painful thing about failure sometimes is just fessing up to it.

Do you *agape* Me, Peter? *Agape* is a *New Testament* word that means: love that is committed to love and meet the needs of the one loved no matter what the circumstance is. So, Peter—do you remember?—you said: You love Me. Do you really *agape* Me? Are you still committed to Me? Are you going to do what I'm asking you to do? Because, Peter, I want you to know that I'm committed to you and that's why I came after you.

That's why Jesus comes after you. If you're here this morning and you don't know Christ, the reason you're here is because He's pulling you in. He says: I know you feel like a failure. The hardest words to say [are]: I failed or I have sinned. He's pulling you in. He wants you to know how much He loves you.

- He wants Peter restored.
- He wants him useful again.
- He wants Peter to feel good about the fact that he is walking with God.

Now, when He came to Peter, He didn't say this: Now, Peter, are you sorry for what you did? Peter, are you ashamed for what you did? Are you ashamed of yourself? Did you promise never to do it again, Peter? All He said is: "Do you love me?"

Now I don't know about you, but if I have failed somebody, I'd rather take a verbal beating from them than to have them look at me and say: Do you love me? (Do you love me?) Why did you do it if you love me?

Do you love Jesus? If you're a believer in here and you've failed—or maybe you're disappointed in people and it's hurt you and it's driving you away from Jesus—the question is not: What are you doing now?—but: Do you love Jesus? Are you committed to Jesus Christ?—because if you are, you have to accept the fact that—

- There will be disappointments in life
- People are going to disappoint you
- Folks are going to hurt you (and)
- You are going to fail

—but that's no excuse for walking away from God. That's more of a reason to cling closer to Jesus than anything else.

Love that overcomes failure: that kind of *agape* love, that's what overcomes failure in marriages. Sometimes I think we're (just) looking for an excuse to walk out. Jesus is saying: Don't look for the excuse, look for the adhesive of love.

He's not throwing Peter out for failure. He's coming to Peter and says: Look, I'm going to help you overcome this, Peter. My love will sustain you. I am committed to you. I just need to know from you, Peter, "Do you love me?"—because if you do, that's all you need. Do you even *phileo* Me? Are you even kindly affectionate toward Me? Even if you can't deep *agape* Me love now, do you have any emotion toward Me? Is there any like for Me? Because if there is, Peter, I'm telling you I can change your life. [That's] love that overcomes failure.

Do you know how you help people when they fail?—not necessarily by pointing out their failures, but encouraging them to keep on (to keep on failing). I think I said this a couple weeks ago (and so): I started adding them up and then I quit, because I have so many more failures than I've ever had successes. Really!—and so have you! Because—

- We all sin.
- We all mess up.
- We all try.
- We all do things that we shouldn't have done.

Jesus wants to remind us: I am committed to loving you and overcoming any failure that you have. That's why He died on the cross for us.

So number one: Love overcomes failure. So whatever your failure is—business, relational, personal, whatever it is—don't let it stop you from loving Jesus. You just need to love Jesus and He will get you

through those things, because Jesus loves you like that. The second thing is a love that cares for people.

2. LOVE THAT CARES FOR PEOPLE

Every time that He asked Peter: “Do you love me?”—and Peter responded: Yes, I do—then He said something for Peter to do.

- In *verse 15*—after He said: “Do you love me?” Peter said: Yes—“Jesus said: “Feed my lambs.”
- In *verse 16*—after Peter said: Yes, I do love You, Lord—He said: “Take care of my sheep.”
- In *verse 17*—after he said: “Lord, you know that I love you.”—then “Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep.’” (Feed my lambs.)

What Jesus is telling Peter and what Jesus is telling us is that if we love Him—it’s not just a feeling; in fact, sometimes it doesn’t even feel good (especially for Peter right now). That love—the kind of love that God has for us—always results in action.

For God so loved the world that He gave {us} His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:16 (NKJV)

It’s an action.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8 (NKJV)

God just doesn’t say: Hey, I love y’all; work it out. He said: I love you and I’m going to come down there and work it out for you. I’m going to demonstrate My love even though you don’t love Me. I’m going to die for you and give you My best so that you could know that love on My part is an action—

- To better you (and)
- To do something for you (and)
- [To] be committed to you even if you aren’t committed to Me.

And that’s why Jesus died on the cross.

And so He said: Peter, show Me the love, Baby. Where’s the love, Peter? You say you love Me, Peter. If you do, then take care of people and love people the way that I love you.

Are y’all familiar with that Willie Nelson song, *Always On My Mind*? [Singing a line from the chorus:] “*You were always on my mind...*” Are you familiar—do you know that song? Okay, good. (How about? [Singing a *Beatles* classic:] “*She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah.*”) You were always on my—do you know what that song—only a guy would think of singing that song to a woman and think it’s romantic. Basically, it’s a guy saying: Hey—

- I know I wasn’t there for you when you needed me
- I know I (you know) left you alone all the time
- I know I was out having fun and I was running around with some other women

—but I want you to know I love you, because, “*You were always on my mind.*” Have you ever listened to those words of those country songs? (I mean) just think about that: Oh, yeah, well, I was out there dancing and having a great time with all those women. Yeah, I was thinking about you. Love you. Hope you like this song.

Listen to what we do with Jesus: Hey, Lord, (you know) I don’t really love people and I don’t like going to church too much, because I don’t like those people down there; because they hurt me; and the preacher changed a bunch of things up. Not only that, God, but—you know what?—I don’t give like I ought to give. I quit praying a long time ago. And I never read the Bible. But I want You to know: I think about You. I love You.

That’s not love. All right, if you told your spouse: Hey, I love you and—

- You never spent time with them
- You never walked with them when there was difficulty
- You never shared with them
- You never gave things to them
- You never demonstrated your love

They would say after awhile: Hey, do you love me? Well, yeah, I told you when we got married I loved you. I wouldn’t have married you if I didn’t love you.

That’s not the issue. The issue is: Love is a constant demonstration of the meeting of the needs of people and loving them in spite of, and in light of, who they really are.

Jesus wants to know: Do you love Me? If you do, then love people the way that I love you. “Feed my sheep.” [Repeated for emphasis]

Now, here’s the deal: No matter what Peter’s failures are—no matter what your failures are and my failures are—Jesus had a job for Peter to do and He wants him to get after it. He said: Peter, quit feeling sorry for yourself. Quit this (you know) beating yourself up and [saying] you’re no good any more. Listen, I died for you because you were no good. I’m living for you so that I can be good in you and through you, Peter. I’m not giving up on you. I’ve got something for you to do and I want you to start getting after it.

That’s what God tells us. I’ve got something for you to do no matter who you are and what you’ve done; and that is, to accept the love that I have for you. I’m always going to be committed to you. I’m always going to be in you and working through you. Love people the way that I love people.

Here’s what Jesus is saying: If you love Me, Peter, you will care about what I care about.

If you love your spouse, will you not care about the things that they care about? Even if you’ve never cared about those things before—because it affects the one that you love—you’re going to care about that. You’re going to care what color that living room gets painted. Aren’t you, fellas?

- You’re going to go look at the swatches
- You’re going to put them up to your face
- You’re going to do all that

Why?—because your wife cares about that. Now you may get with the guys and say: You can’t believe what I did today. (You know) if your husband cares about football, you’re going to be in there not bothering him and letting him watch football because you love him. If you love somebody, you care about what they care about.

Do you know what Jesus cared about? The one thing I know He was passionately addicted to when He was on this earth and what He is passionately addicted to now?—people (people).

There was never a person that Jesus did not have time for. There was never a person with a need that Jesus encountered that He did not address that need.

- He looked into their heart
- He knew what was there (and)
- He loved them (and)
- He showed them things (and)

People were overwhelmed by the fact that God would come to them and would love them in that manner.

Jesus didn't spend a whole lot of time with religious people. In fact, He had some words for them that weren't very kind. (You know) read the *Gospel of Matthew* sometime. Read *Matthew 23*—Jesus is scathing. He got on them about their hypocrisy—about loading up too many laws and traditions on people and not even lifting one finger to help them out. He said: You are making a person twice this child of hell by putting all your stuff on them. You missed the whole point! It is summed up with this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [*Matthew 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8*]

So, where did Jesus go? He went to—

- The outcast
- The marginalized
- Those without hope
- Those people who are rejected

—folks [who] didn't have anything to give and didn't have good morals, and weren't the kind of people that the Pharisees were. Jesus went to them and He ate with sinners and tax gatherers... like you and like me.

Do you love people like that? Here's what happens sometimes after you get into a church for awhile: you start isolating yourself, and rather than everybody on the outside having a passion to get them on the inside, you protect yourself because those are evil people. Let me remind you, you're just as wicked; you just have Jesus. That's what makes the difference. Jesus Christ changes you. And without Jesus you'd still be on the outside—I'd still be on the outside. So what we need to do is: understand those are not enemies; those are people that Jesus died for. And Jesus wants us to love them the way He loves us. (He wants us to love them the way that He loves us.)

So why is Jesus hounding Peter (I mean) three times? (I couldn't even take one. I would have been just laid out, saying: Oh, God, I'm sorry!) Three times, over and over and over and over again. Do you know why?—because Jesus wanted Peter to have a love that stayed on mission.

3. LOVE THAT STAYS ON MISSION

Look at *verse 1*:

¹ Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus),

Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

John 21:1-2 (NIV)

In other words, they're just hanging out. [Peter is thinking:] Jesus appeared a couple of times, and we don't know where He is now. And we're scared something bad is going to happen. (And you know) I haven't had a one-off with Jesus yet about that whole denial thing that I did. And maybe God just isn't going to be with us anymore. So Peter has this great idea: Let's go fishing.

"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night [—let's say this together:] they caught nothing.

John 21:3 (NIV)

They caught nothing! They said: You know what? Let's go back [to] the way it used to be. Let's go back and do something that we know how to do. This whole following-Jesus thing isn't easy. And we ought to go back to fishing, because—you remember—we used to be able to fish. I mean, come on, we were the best fishermen in town. Now let's go back to something we know how to do. Let's be productive with our lives. Forget about this, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel." [*Mark 16:15 (NIV)*] Come on, we failed. (Peter, even in his failure is still the leader and the disciples go with him.) Let's go back. Let's go back, let's get off mission.

So, three times:

- Do you love me?—Yes.
- Do you love me?—Yes.
- Do you love me?
 - Stay on mission, feed My sheep.
 - Stay on mission, tend My lambs.
 - Stay on mission, feed My sheep.

—because, if we are not careful, the work of God is threatened when we say: I'm going back; I'm not going forward anymore.

And when you fail or when you get disappointed—

- By people
- By a church
- By me
- By another pastor
- Whatever

—and you say: You know what? I quit; I'm going back. But when you do that, you don't go back alone. People go back with you. [You think:] Oh, well, you know, I'm not a leader. Yes you are! People are looking at you and they're wondering how you're going to handle stuff. And they're going to look at you and they're going to say: Aha! I knew it wasn't real. They went back. And there are other people that you affect. More people have left churches because somebody they knew left the church and so they left too. They went off mission.

Now this is a very serious thing—they are saying in their heart—they're taking the first step to say: We're no longer going to be disciples. We are going to go back to doing our own thing. If they stay fishermen and not fishers of men—guess what?—we might not be in this building today—

- Because a whole bunch of dominoes would have started falling
- Because they got off mission
- Because they didn't do what God called them to do
- Because they didn't go out and win the Jew and win the Samaritan and win the Gentile

—because we for the most part (unless you have Jewish blood in you) are Gentiles. And Peter had that dream about the Gospel being open to the Gentiles. Do you remember that? And if Peter had been off mission, that dream wouldn't have happened and we may have been dead and burning in hell because somebody got off mission.

Now, here's the sobering thought: Who is going to die and go to hell if we get off mission? Dad, if you decide you're not going to go to church anymore, guess what your kids are going to decide? They may go for awhile because mom makes them, but after awhile they aren't going to go, they're going to check-out. It's not going to be important to them. The people at work [and] your neighbors: they look; they want to know. And the minute you get off mission they won't stand a chance. You've got to stay in the game. You've got to stay engaged, and the only person God *can't* use is a person [who] quits. God can't use you; you're off mission.

He's telling Peter: I'm going to use you, get back on mission.

Do you know how many failures most successful people have had in their lives? (I mean) this is just a couple of people that you will all know; listen to the failures they had:

Abraham Lincoln, for example, (now this is hilarious):

- He went to war as a captain and he returned as a private; that's down [a demotion].
- He was a failure as a businessman.
- He was a failure as a lawyer.
- He turned to politics and was defeated in his first try for the legislature, his first attempt to be nominated for Congress.
- Defeated to be the Commissioner of the General Land Office.
- Defeated in his Senatorial election in 1854.
- Defeated for the Vice Presidency in 1856.
- Defeated in the Senate election in 1858.

About that time he wrote these words in a letter to a friend: "*I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family there would not be one cheerful face on earth.*" That's pretty depressed. The next year he was the President of the United States of America. What if he [had] quit? What if he'd walked away? What would have happened? Would we still have slavery in this country today if this man, who had failed so many times, failed to win the Presidency because he didn't show up?

What about **Henry Ford**? Do you know how many times he failed? Five times he went bankrupt trying to make the automobile. The sixth time, he made it.

R.H. Macy, of *Macy's* department stores failed—bankrupt—seven times before a store in New York City caught on.

Babe Ruth, famous in the past for his home-run records, for decades he also held the strike-out record. He hit 714 home-runs and struck out 1330 times in his career, about which he said (and I quote) "*Every strike brings me closer to the next home run.*"

[**Thomas Edison**] failed 1000 times to create the electric light bulb. On the 1001 time, he created it. We'd still be in the dark! [Imagine] the 1000 time: I quit! I can't take it anymore! All right, I'll give it one more shot—BING! You'd still be burning yourself with candles!

Winston Churchill, the great Prime Minister of England, struggled in school and failed the sixth grade. He faced many years of political failures. He was defeated every election for public office—every election!—until he finally became the Prime Minister at 62 years of age.

So don't you tell me, if you're in your 50s or 60s or 70s: I just don't know, I've failed, I've failed, I've failed. Let me tell you what—ready?—let's do the test. [Demonstrates putting two fingers on the carotid artery in his neck:] We feel it?—the pulse is beating?—there's hope! There's hope! You can still succeed, but you can't if you quit. You just can't.

Michael Jordan was actually thrown off of his—he did not make his high school basketball team. But he didn't stop. He kept on practicing. He kept on playing. And here's what he says: *“I have missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions I have been entrusted to take the game-winning shot, and I missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”*

Because: if you're *not* failing, you're *not* trying.

I'm going to tell you something about Peter. He stepped up—no one else would—he stepped up. He stepped out of the boat. He knew who Jesus was and he proclaimed without any fear [and] without any hesitation. He made some big mistakes in his life, but he made them because he was trying to do some big things for God. And he ended up—after this—doing tremendously big things for God.

But if you quit and you get out of the game, God *can't* use you. You've got to stay in the game. *Verse 4:*

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven't you any fish?”...
John 21:4-5 (NIV)

Now, Jesus knows this, right? I mean, he knows they don't have any fish. And so, he's just kind of grinding it in a little bit: Hey, fishermen, who went back to what they do best, do you have anything? (You know) a fisherman will [be thinking]: Well, you're on the shore. At least I'm trying to fish. (Of course they didn't say that.)

⁵ ...“No,” they answered.

⁶ He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

John 21:5-6 (NIV)

Do you know who controls your circumstances in life?—Jesus does. Jesus can do in an instant what they couldn't do fishing all night long. He can do in a moment what you've not been able to do in your lifetime, if you don't quit. Jesus controls their success. The success of the disciples in catching those

fish was not because they were good fishermen—they were skunked—it was because Jesus *made* them a success.

And you may have failed, and you may continue to fail; but the moment you give up you have lost all potential for success. And God is just—

- Allowing you to humble yourself
- Allowing you to be able to understand His power
- Who's setting up all types of good things for you

And you are one or two more failures away from being a great success. Now, doesn't that encourage you?

But this is what Peter's life was doing. God is in control of our success. They would have continued to fail unless He intervened. And when God did intervene: tremendous success.

Do you know what? Jesus is responsible for our success. Do you know what we're responsible for?—our obedience; just to obey God.

And they did: Okay, we'll do what you say, Lord. Even in the midst of their disobedience God said: Hey, on the other side of the boat. They did. And when they did, God blessed them. It wasn't the first time this happened. And that's why Jesus allowed this miracle and did this miracle. This is how these guys were called to follow Jesus.

In *Luke's Gospel, chapter 5, verses 8 through 11*, Jesus is teaching the crowds. They're pushing in on Him so much they're driving Him into the lake. And so He turns to Peter and John and the boy and said: Hey, I'm getting in the boat. Push out a little bit and let me teach. And so he does. And after His teaching, He turned to Peter: Now, go out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch. Now, Peter said: Lord, (you know) I've seen you do some miracles and You're a great teacher, but I'm a fisherman. I've fished these waters all my life. It's the middle of the day. You're not going to catch any fish. In the deep water—they're not even there right now. Our ropes for our nets don't even go down that far. Okay, but since you say, (you know) you're the Lord, I'll give you credit—you're God—so we'll do it. And they did. And when it happened, they pulled up so many fish that the nets began to break. And Peter's boat began to sink because of these fish. And they had to call his buddies over and start dumping some of the fish into their boat. [*Luke 5:1-7* (paraphrased)] And this is what happened:

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

Luke 5:8 (NIV)

He said: God, You're holy and I'm not. (And) this is the work of God, and I'm just overwhelmed, God.

⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. {—had done the same thing.}

¹¹ Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; {said Jesus} from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Luke 5:9-11 (NIV)

They responded to the mission and the calling of God on their lives. That's what Jesus is doing—He said: Do you remember the commitment you made to Me? Do you remember how it felt when I first called you? Do you remember what it was like to get a glimpse of the supernatural and the glorious power that I am willing to give to you and share with you when I called you? Do you remember that? Why are you going back to fishing that doesn't produce anything? Why aren't you fishing for men—why aren't you?

They immediately left their nets and followed Jesus. They immediately got into the people business—immediately.

Why aren't we in the people business? Now, we've tried to do some things in the church. And we've failed in some things and I gloriously led us in those failures. But all that is just (kind of) figuring out: Okay, we won't do that anymore. That one's out of the way. Let's go on to the next one.

Are there people in your life that you are so passionate about because you care for them like Jesus cares for them? That as a church we are still on mission? Are we more concerned about our own personal hurts and failures that we are going to allow the opportunities to save the world to slip through our fingers, like holding sand on a beach?

When they figured out it was Jesus, I want you to see what Peter does. You've just got to love this about Peter—*verses 7 and 8*, "Then the disciple whom Jesus loved..." I like the way that John (kind of) always (you know) tells people he loved Jesus more than anybody else.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, {they probably should have put—in parentheses: the big mouth who always failed} "It is the Lord," {as soon as Simon Peter heard him say that it's the Lord} he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. {Is this not Peter? I'm just jumping in the water, man. They're 100 yards off the shore!} ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat {because they had sense} towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

John 21:7-9 (NIV)

Why in the world would Peter jump off that boat? Why would he slosh through all of that water and make his way up to that shore? I'll tell you why: Because this [is a] very intentional miracle—not only to put the fish in the net, but to keep the fish out of the net all night—

- So Jesus could remind Peter of his calling.
- So he would remember the moment when Christ was real and worthy of everything that he had.
- That he would remember the cross
- That he would remember the power of the blood of Jesus Christ.
- That he would remember that he was called to something that was so much bigger than catching fish; he was catching men.

Whatever we do, Church—whatever job God has given you that will give you money—our main vocation (as a church) is: we are fishers of men. God has empowered us and God will provide for us as long as we are loving people the way that He wants us to love people, God will bless us. God will take care of us. We need to be reminded:

- By the grace of God, we were saved.
- By the grace of God, we've been placed in this church.

We are no [more] special than anybody else other than Jesus loves us. And we've got this great opportunity to tell people just like us—who have failed and have been disappointed and wondered if God loves them—yes, He does. Look at us! (Look at us.) We love you.

For those of us who are discouraged that life isn't turning out the way we thought and we want to go back: don't do that. Don't go back. Lots of people will turn around if you go back. All of those dominos are going to fall. And—you don't know—you are one day away, one hour away, one commitment away from the biggest blessing you've ever had.

Verse 10 and then we'll close.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

¹¹ Simon Peter climbed aboard {again, this is Peter} and dragged the net ashore. {So, the boats are still out there.} It was full of large fish, 153, {—that's how you know they're fishermen—not a small one and we had 153 of them—} but even with so many the net was not torn.

¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." {With 153—say they're 2 pounds apiece—you've got over 300 pounds of fish that he is lugging up there in the water.} None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took bread and he gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

John 21:10-13 (NIV)

Now, Jesus is sitting by this fire and as He's sitting by the fire—there's a reason why John calls attention to that fire; because, it's a charcoal fire. There [are] only two times in the *New Testament* that this is mentioned. Here and—guess where else?—outside of the trial of Jesus where Peter was warming himself. And I imagine as Peter walked up to the shore with all of those fish and he smelled that fire, immediately he remembered: Oh my gosh! It wasn't too long ago, I was standing by a fire denying Him; and now He is sitting by a fire loving me and providing for me and taking care of me.

Jesus uses failures. He said: I know what you did, Peter. I knew it before you were even born. I've known everything about you, Peter. Here's what I'm saying: I love you and I desperately need you to be on mission; because there are more people just like you that need to hear the Gospel, Peter. I am depending on you.

Second thing that's in there: Where did Jesus get those fish He was cooking? He didn't fish. Do you know how He did it? [Snaps his fingers:] Fish please—whoop!—there they were. Oh, frying pan and oil...corn meal...some bread would be nice.

Here's what He is saying: Here's a choice that you can have—next time you're thinking about getting off of mission, Peter—you're thinking about quitting because of:

- Your failure (or)
- The failures of others (or)
- The disappointment that you have in other people

Here's what I want you to think about. I want you thinking about the fact that you've fished all night and you had nothing—your nets were empty—because you were spinning your wheels. You were off mission. I can't bless you when that happens.

So we need to think about the fact that if we're not busy loving people the way Jesus wants us to love them—being on mission and reaching out to folks—that we're going to die and go to heaven one day and we're going to have empty nets. There is no excuse for an empty net. Not when Jesus has dropped it right there and it can be full. Remember that you always end up with an empty net when you go off mission. Whatever you think is better than Jesus—

- Is empty (and it)
- Is futile (and it)
- Is fruitless

You are here today because you have determined that life just isn't that great. Jesus said: I know; that's why I came to die and give you life and give you purpose. You need to give your life to Jesus today. Others of us—who have drifted off of mission because we're hurt or disappointed or don't agree or we've failed—we need to get back on mission. All of us do.

Now, why did He ask Peter, "...do you love me more than these?" [*John 21:15 (NIV)*] I don't think He was talking about the rest of the disciples. Because, He knows they're always jockeying with one another. He's not going to fuel their ego and their ambition. What are the "these"? The only thing left in the story is the 153 fish. Peter, do you love me more than these fish?

What are your fish that you might love more than Jesus? What's the reason for going off mission? Because what we're saying when we're off mission...

- We're not ministering to people
- We're not serving people (and)
- We're not loving God
- We're not loving people.

[Peter] said: Look, this is more important to me.

- My fish is my hurt.
- My fish is my failure.
- My fish is my rejection.
- My fish is right here. [Indicating anything right in front of him.]

And Jesus wants to know: Do you love the fish more than you love Me? The fish aren't worth living for, but Jesus is and others are.

Jesus has a way of cutting through the stuff [and] walking right into the living room of your heart and saying: Hey, what's this? As He's walked right into the living room of our heart and He has sat down—

- Is He sitting down with someone inside of that heart [who] is passionate and wants to follow Him and wants to reach out and love people? —Or—
- Is He sitting down on that couch and there's a note pinned to the pillow next to Him that said—hey—gone fishing? (Gone fishing.)

I think God is serious about meeting our needs as a church and as individuals. And He's also serious about doing that in the context of us reaching out and loving people. Everybody knows somebody who

used to come to church, who doesn't go to church anywhere anymore. Go get them! If that were you, wouldn't you want someone to come get you? All of us know someone [who] is so far from God, who has no clue how much Jesus loves them. And if they could just see and have demonstrated the love of Christ in their life—[if] somebody would go after them— it wouldn't take long before they would say what Peter said: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [*Matthew 16:15 (NIV)*] I know everybody knows people like that:

- Your own family members (maybe)
- Friends next door
- People you go to school with
- People you work with
- Folks that you're going to be out there Labor-Daying with today and tomorrow.

Here's what I want you to do. There's a commitment card right here [displays it from the *Gaming Packet* distributed upon entering] and I want you to take it out. You're not even going to turn this in. Here's what I want you to do. There [are] five spaces there. You've got to know 5 people [who] need to be loved like Jesus loves, don't you? You've got to have family members or someone who used to go to church with you, [who] got mad about something or hurt or disappointed; and now they're not going anywhere. They're just being run/steamrolled by the enemy of this world. Go get them. Pray for them. Actively share your faith. Five people: Do you have five people?

Those of you at *Fry Road*, you've done this before. Pastor Bryan has led you in this. Do you know how a church grows?—love grows a church, folks—love does. Do you know what love does?

- Love loves people like Jesus loves people
- ...lays down its life so that other people can have life in Christ

Do we have a passionate, beating heart for the things of God; or is there a little sign on our heart that says:

- Gone Fishing
- No time for that
- I'm off mission

Let's pray together as our heads are bowed and eyes are closed:

Lord, You have called us to be fishers of men. God, You have empowered us through the Holy Spirit. You have encouraged us through Your example. You are with us, God. And You are reaching out to the entire world. And You use failures and disappointed/hurt people just like us to go and find failing/disappointed/hurt people and let them know about the love of Christ. I pray that You'd give everyone of us five people, God—

- [Who] we could love
- [Who] we could interact with
- [Who] we could go after

So keep us on mission.

I pray for all of the folks at *Fry Road* and all of the people here at *Jones Road*, God, that you would make us an army of loving people loving each other and loving the world around us.

If you are here this morning and you don't know who Christ is, I'm going to ask you to pray this prayer silently as I do aloud; and it goes like this:

Dear God, I don't want to be a failure in this life. I want to live in the life that is to come. So I ask You to forgive me. Give me a brand-new life. I've sinned. My sin put You on the cross, but You went there because You loved me. Cleanse me with Your blood and give me a new life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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**This Good News tells us how God makes us
right in his sight. This is accomplished
from start to finish by faith.
As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith
that a righteous person has life."**

Romans 1:17
(*New Living Translation*)

Legend:

(**words in parentheses**) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea
[**words in square brackets**] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher
{**words in curly brackets within indented quote**} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*