

Failure, Forgiveness, & Love

BOB HEERSPINK

Today on this episode of *Groundwork*, we are digging into one of the stories of Christ's post-resurrection appearances to discover how it speaks to our lives. On today's episode, we discuss failure, forgiveness, and love in the light of Jesus' appearance to his disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From ReFrame Media and Words of Hope, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

Bob, as you know, one of the features of our *Groundwork* program is that we are interactive. We really do want to have give and take with our listeners, incorporate some of their questions and comments into the program. Now, we are not live so we cannot do a call in, but we are using our website, groundworkonline.com, and we are putting some questions there that we will address in programs, and then getting feedback from the listeners.

BOB HEERSPINK

And recently we posted this question, Dave: How do you know you are forgiven? How do you really know that someone has forgiven you? We got some interesting comments back. Annette, for example, left this posting: you have to have faith the person really forgives you. I mean, you cannot just not believe them.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is good. I mean, often we emphasize how hard it is to forgive – to do the forgiving. We less often acknowledge the fact that it could be equally hard to believe you are forgiven; to accept or receive forgiveness; and that takes faith, as Annette says.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, and Brandi left this comment: For me, it is much easier to accept that someone has forgiven me. What is difficult is to forgive myself and accept that.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I can identify with that, I think; probably we all can.

BOB HEERSPINK

We tend to lay down our guilt. We confess, and then at the end of our confession we just pick it up and keep carrying it right along.

DAVE BAST

Here is one from Kenny: If someone says, "I forgive you," then your only job is to thank them and love them. The rest is really between them and God.

BOB HEERSPINK

Now, that is a very interesting comment because his comment connects forgiveness and love. There is a connection between the two that we sometimes forget.

DAVE BAST

And that is the theme that we want to begin with today because there is just a wonderful story of forgiveness and love in one of the resurrection stories about Jesus. It is in John 21; quite familiar to most of us, I am sure. It is where Jesus meets with his disciples in Galilee, along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Now, Peter and a number of the others have gone north from Jerusalem to Galilee. It is during this forty-day period between the resurrection and the ascension; and time starts to weigh heavily, you get the feeling, on...especially with Peter. So impulsively, as usual, he jumps up and he says: I am going fishing; and off they go in the old boat – the old life. They fish all night and catch nothing; and then as they are pulling in, they see this figure on the shore who calls out to them and says: Have you caught anything? No. Drop your nets on the other side; and as they do, suddenly there is this huge mass of fish that fill the nets; and John, who is in the boat with Peter, says to him: It's the Lord. It must have called to their mind that earlier occasion years before...

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes.

DAVE BAST

You know, when the same thing happened. So Peter jumps in the water, swims to shore, and as they pull in, they see Jesus sitting there waiting for them with a fire on the beach.

BOB HEERSPINK

He has made their breakfast for them, and you can imagine what an uncomfortable silence must have pervaded as they see Jesus, they know who he is, and yet the scriptures say they didn't quite dare ask: Who are you?

DAVE BAST

Yes, right. There is kind of an eerie atmosphere.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes.

DAVE BAST

You can almost see the dawn and the mist and everything surrounding this encounter.

BOB HEERSPINK

And there is a charcoal fire burning. I suspect that fire along the shore might have reminded him of the fire that burned in the high priest's courtyard when he denied his Lord.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

BOB HEERSPINK

After the breakfast, there is this amazing conversation between Jesus and Peter that really picks up that whole episode. This is what it says:

21:15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him,

“Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

DAVE BAST

You know, let's just focus on that question for starters. Three times Jesus asks Peter the same thing: Do you love me? I think of all the questions he might have asked him. If I had been in Jesus' place, I might have been tempted to kind of dig in a little bit with Peter: hey, are you going to obey me now? Do you believe me? You denied me, but...

BOB HEERSPINK

Are you sorry for what you did?

DAVE BAST

Yes; how about that?! But no, just this same question over and over: Do you love me? I think that is the key question, really, in our relationship with Christ.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, that certainly brings us into the key question in our relationships. I mean, we really are motivated to confess and to be forgiven if we are in a relationship of love; and if that is true of our human relationships, certainly that would be eminently true of our relationship with Christ.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, love is the one great requirement when it comes to Jesus Christ. Love covers a multitude of sins, the Bible says; so his love for us is enough to make him want to forgive Peter; but if you think about it, love is also the natural response to that grace or that forgiveness; and this is the key thing, I think, that really explains Peter's life. For all that he did, for all of his bluster and his failure and his denial, for his pride and his boasting – all of that – deep down he really loved Jesus Christ. Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. I have often used that over and over myself, you know, in my times of failure. I can honestly say for all that I have been, all that I have said and done: Lord, you know that I love you.

BOB HEERSPINK

But we need to think, Dave, a little bit more closely about the relationship between love and forgiveness. Does love trigger forgiveness? Does Jesus forgive Peter because Peter loves him so much?

DAVE BAST

No; you know, I think it would be more accurate to say Jesus forgives Peter because *he* loves Peter.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; love covers a multitude of sins, even Peter's sins.

DAVE BAST

Yes; which is actually from 1 Peter, so there is...

BOB HEERSPINK

That's right!

DAVE BAST

He knew from experience, didn't he? But you know, there is more to it than just this relational thing. Love is much more than just forgiveness and a kind of warm feeling.

BOB HEERSPINK

You are right, Dave. Love really motivates, and that is what we have to talk about next.

DAVE BAST

But first, let's pause and talk about how listeners can join us in this conversation on our website.

BOB HEERSPINK

Listeners like you make *Groundwork* what it is. Our website, groundworkonline.com, is another way that we work to join you as you dig deeper into the scriptures.

DAVE BAST

There, we continue to reflect on today's discussion about our world and the Bible, as well as many other conversations that listeners have begun about scripture and how it interacts with their lives. We would also like you to help us think about upcoming programs. One of the things we are wondering is how you are working for justice in your life.

BOB HEERSPINK

Share your thoughts on this upcoming question. Finding us is easy. Just visit our website, groundworkonline.com.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

We have been talking about the relationship of love and forgiveness, and looking at the story of Jesus' encounter – his great conversation with Peter after the resurrection on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Three times Jesus says: Do you love me? And three times Peter replies: Yes, Lord. You know that I love you. But this is not actually the first time that Peter has seen Jesus after the resurrection.

BOB HEERSPINK

That is right.

DAVE BAST

There is a wonderful reference...it is not spelled out what happened, but it says that on Easter afternoon Peter met Jesus one on one...

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes.

DAVE BAST

And that must have been the time when their relationship was healed, when there was a kind of reconciliation, when Jesus forgave Peter and Peter responded with this love.

BOB HEERSPINK

So even when Peter is on the shore here, he knows he has been reconciled to his Lord...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

But there is something else going on in this story that is really important;

DAVE BAST

Right.

BOB HEERSPINK

And it is not just the love of Peter, but the way Jesus responds to that love.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you have to ask the question: Why is this encounter described when the first one isn't?

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, it is obviously not...the focus is not on the restoration of the relationship, but a kind of a restoration of Peter to ministry. I think that is the key.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, that is the key, because Peter disenfranchised himself from ministry when he denied Christ. That was a public denial of the Lord. Now there needs to be a public restoration to ministry.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; and so, you get to not just the question and answer: Do you love me? Yes, Lord, you know...but it is followed by a charge – by a commission. Three times Jesus says: Then feed my sheep; feed my lambs; tend my sheep. Now, I don't think that is saying three different things. I think it is one charge repeated with slight variations three times. Peter is called to the ministry of the word. That is how God's people are fed; that is how they are nourished, protected; they are led; they are guided. Peter is going to be once more the chief of the apostles.

BOB HEERSPINK

And in that role as under-shepherd to Jesus, love is going to have to motivate him.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

I think love is a key motivator for all of us as Christian disciples.

DAVE BAST

Love for Christ.

BOB HEERSPINK

Love for...

DAVE BAST

Not just love for people.

BOB HEERSPINK

That is right.

DAVE BAST

But love for Christ is what drives us to do what we do. It is not so much guilt. Guilt can motivate at times; but I don't think people do very much in the kingdom because they feel guilty.

BOB HEERSPINK

Sometimes the Church tries to make guilt or duty the motivating factor, but I find, at least in my own ministry, that when people responded to a job to do because: Well, if I don't do it I feel guilty or I have to take my turn. It is my duty to do this. There is no joy in it, and there is really not the blessing to others that could flow from it.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, I just think of one of the powerful experiences of my life. It was the first time I ever visited India and we were in the city of Calcutta. We visited the shrine of Kali, the goddess of Calcutta; and as we were coming away from that, the person who was taking us around said: Here, come with me; and we went into a kind of small, nondescript building nearby; and as we walked through the door, I discovered that we were in Mother Teresa's hospice, where they cared for the dying from the streets of Calcutta. There on the wall right opposite the entrance was a picture of her and one of her favorite sayings: Do something beautiful for Jesus today.

BOB HEERSPINK

What a powerful contrast in terms of what motivates people. You know, the motivator for a Christian: Love of Christ; doing something beautiful for him. It reminds me of the story of a nurse who was tending the wounds of a leper and a visitor was there and said: you know, I wouldn't do that for a million dollars; and the nurse turned and said: I wouldn't either.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; neither would I; that is great. You know, I mean, personally, what keeps you in ministry, Bob? It is not that easy. It is not a glamorous job. You don't have the respect, you know, of a bygone era.

BOB HEERSPINK

No; and it is not even enough simply to say: Well, as a pastor I love people. You know, yes, I do love people, but people can be frustrating. Sometimes I would say: you know, being a pastor is the perfect job if it just weren't for the people.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

BOB HEERSPINK

It is still the love of Jesus that motivates my ministry.

DAVE BAST

Well, you know, I mean, this is why I am interested in seeing the Gospel be shared with the whole world. It is more than just that I think people need the Gospel – I do; I want to see Christ glorified because I love him. I want to see him worshipped. I want to see him known, and given the honor that is due his name; and that kind of love has always driven outreach for the Church.

BOB HEERSPINK

But Dave, in that kind of ministry there is always a price to pay; but love makes us willing to pay the price.

DAVE BAST

We will pick up that thought in a moment; but first, since *Groundwork* is all about digging into the scripture and applying it to our lives, we want to tell you about some additional resources we offer to guide you on your spiritual journey.

BOB HEERSPINK

We recommend two daily devotionals: *Today*, and *Words of Hope*. Each one of them contains a Bible reading and a daily meditation. They are short and concise, but they dig beneath the surface of scripture, so they are ideal for everyone with a busy life.

DAVE BAST

Both of these devotionals are designed with you in mind. Whether you would like to receive each one in a booklet form, or have it delivered to your e-mail each day or listen to it on your commute to work, you will

always find the spiritual nourishment you are looking for.

BOB HEERSPINK

You can find more information about *Today* and *Words of Hope* devotionals on the resource page of our website at groundworkonline.com.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

So, love for Christ is what motivates us to serve him, and that is not just true in far away places like India. A friend was telling me a story about someone he knew who had a jail ministry...not a pastor, just an ordinary person, a follower of Jesus; and this guy visited the county jail to see a particular prisoner every week for something like three years, and the guy he went to see would refuse to come out; so he never, for three years, never met the person he came to visit; and then one week he shows up at the jail and here comes this prisoner to meet him for the first time; and the guy said to him: Why now? Why today? And the prisoner replied: Because I wanted to see someone who would come every week for three years – I wanted to see kind of a person would do that; and the answer is, somebody who loves Jesus Christ...

BOB HEERSPINK

Someone who loves Jesus. You know, that is the amazing thing. This prisoner is saying: Well, do they love *me* that much? But really, it was really the love of Christ shining through that person's life to that prisoner in the jail whom he had never met.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so love motivates service, but it also motivates costly service, costly discipleship, because there is a price that ministry extracts.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, and that is where this story really ends up between Jesus and Peter...

DAVE BAST

Right.

BOB HEERSPINK

Because there is this remarkable prophecy that Jesus offers with regard to Peter's life. Let me just read what Jesus says. He says:

¹⁸"Truly, truly I say to you, when you were young you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old you will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." And here is John's comment on what Jesus said: ¹⁹This he said to show by what kind of death Peter was to glorify God; and after saying this Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me."

DAVE BAST

So, Jesus first questions Peter: Do you love me? Peter responds: Yes. Then he commissions him: Feed my sheep; and then he tells him in this rather cryptic way that eventually he is going to be led out to execution, and tradition tells us that that happened. I think of the scene in the upper room, again, the connection between Peter's denial and this restoration in John 21. Peter had loudly proclaimed: Though they all forsake you, I will never forsake you. I will even die with you or for you, Peter says in the upper room; and then of course, he goes on to deny him; but now Jesus is telling him: you know what, Peter? You are going to make good on that boast at the end of your life. You will die for me.

BOB HEERSPINK

Dave, in ministry we want to think that we are always in charge, and Peter was the kind of guy who always wanted to be in charge of his life. We like to be in charge of our lives; but here Jesus is saying: The cost of following me – the cost of discipleship – really means that you lose control. For Peter, this means losing

control even unto death.

DAVE BAST

Well, you know the famous book by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*; Bonhoeffer, the German martyr during World War II, said that when Jesus calls a man he bids him come and die; and that is certainly true in spiritual terms, and sometimes it is true physically as well. I have a friend – I think I can call him a friend – an Iranian believer; his name is Ali. He lives in a city in northern Iran, and he was arrested some time ago, charged with the crime of witnessing to the Lord Jesus. He was held in solitary confinement for a month and a half. He was beaten; he was interrogated harshly; and when I met him sometime after that experience and asked him about it, he said: you know, actually, I spent my time worshipping the Lord. That was all I had was time. I was alone; and one day a guard came up to me and said: Can you worship your God even here? And I told him: Yes; my God is everywhere. And then Ali said this to me: I never felt closer to the Lord than those days. My time in prison was the best time of my life. Those were the best days.

BOB HEERSPINK

An amazing testimony.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is how love can inspire us to even endure sacrifice and suffering.

BOB HEERSPINK

If you look at the words that are here in John 21, John says: ¹⁹This Jesus said to show by what kind of death Peter was to glorify God. To glorify God, not just to serve God but to glorify him. The hour of Christ's death was his hour of glorification.

DAVE BAST

Not just to endure...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

But to bring more glory to God.

BOB HEERSPINK

And now this story about Ali; he is really saying: This time spent in prison undergoing, as it were, a kind of death for the sake of Jesus was the time I was closest to him, where I was worshipping him, where I was glorifying him. Christ was glorified in that Iranian prison cell.

DAVE BAST

The very last thing Jesus said to Peter in John 21 was: Follow me.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Which, not coincidentally, was also the very first thing he had said to Peter when he called him: Follow me. It is full circle. The life of discipleship is following Jesus.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, and now Peter understands better what it means to follow. He understands the motivation of love. Love motivates us to sacrifice, to obey; and when we do stumble and fall, it motivates us to get up and accept forgiveness and keep going.

DAVE BAST

Yes; we had another great web comment from Brian, who said of Peter: God uses failed people time and time again for his work. Do we have the right to hold failure over someone else's head, being colossal failures ourselves? Of course not.

BOB HEERSPINK

I really love that. God uses failures; and not just Peter. He uses me, he uses you. The love of God is so great that he can use failures like us for the sake of his kingdom.

DAVE BAST

Thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation; and don't forget it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life.

BOB HEERSPINK

So tell us what you think about what you are hearing, and suggest topics or passages that you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/failure-forgiveness-love>

Printed on September 5, 2025