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The Road to Restoration

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Series: Disciple
John 21

I'm a sports guy. I love sports. I like sports for a lot of reasons, but one of the biggest ones is...Where else are you going to see such primal displays of raw emotion from grown adults? In our civilized culture, it doesn't happen anywhere else. Think about it. If you are at the office this week and you make a big sale, you're not allowed to jump out of your chair and scream, "Let's goooo!" Mean mug all your colleagues. Goofy hand signals. (If you watch NBA, you know what I'm doing. Everybody else is like, "What is this guy doing up here?")

You can't do this at the office, but you can do this if you hit a game winner, and everybody loves it. If you put the team on your back and architect a dramatic comeback, you can do this, and everybody loves it. Even people who don't care about sports love to witness a comeback. You should have seen my house during the last three minutes of the Florida/Texas Tech game during March Madness last month. (I'm a big Gators fan, for those of you here who don't know.)

At this point in the game, there are three minutes left. We're down nine. ESPN has given us a 4 percent chance of winning. Have you seen how they've been doing this? Live, at that moment, we have a 4 percent chance. We're going to lose the game, and I'm a sad person. I'm not screaming. I'm not mad. I'm sad. But also, don't talk to me. My sweet wife is like, "You need a hug?" She says this. I said, "Babe, don't touch me." This is where I'm at. This is what's happening.

I'm thinking about how I'm going to move on with my life, and then it starts happening. Tommy Haugh, Walter Clayton Jr.... They're stroking threes, and I'm losing it. My wife couldn't care less, truly, but she's losing it too, because it's the comeback. Everybody loves the comeback. We even make movies about the great comebacks. They're super popular...*Miracle on Ice, Rudy, Rocky, Cool Runnings*.

Today, we are going to talk about another great comeback story, the comeback of the apostle Peter. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and turn to or type to John 21. That's where we'll be today. This is where Peter makes his comeback. Peter's comeback story is amazing because he goes on this journey from absolute failure to the leader of the early church after Christ ascends.

Before we get to his comeback in John 21, we have to talk about what he came back *from*, what he was restored *from*. There's a scene a few days before our text today, a very famous scene. It's the Last Supper. Jesus is having his last dinner with his 12 closest friends. Is there a meal more packed with meaning in all of history than this Last Supper?

First of all, it's a big holiday dinner. This is like Christmas dinner for the Jews. It's Passover dinner. And Jesus is doing surprising and historical things all throughout the evening. It's at this dinner that Jesus institutes Communion, which ends up being a pretty big deal for the next 2,000 years. It's at that dinner that he washes his disciples' feet.

It's at this dinner that he dips his bread in a cup and hands it to his friend Judas, at which point Satan enters into Judas, who runs out and sets in motion his betrayal to death. What a meal to be at, this holiday dinner. Then, after dinner, Jesus does something else surprising. He looks at his friends and says, "All you guys are about to leave me. You're about to fall away from me."

But Peter... He's bold. He's the leader of the Twelve. He's also apparently a little bit arrogant, because he's like, "Not me, Lord." Like, "No way. I will never leave you." Jesus is like, "Peter, you're not seeing yourself correctly. Actually, tonight you're going to deny that you even know me three times." Peter is like, "No, Lord. I'm ready to die for you. I'll die for you." It's like, "Peter, don't oversell, man. He's not even asking you to do that."

In the next scene, Jesus *does* ask Peter to do something in the garden. Do you guys remember this? A little bit easier than "Die." "Hey, stay awake. Can you watch and pray for me?" Peter can't even do that. Peter has good plans, but he has no power. It's so human. It's so relatable. Good plans, no power. Have you ever felt like that?

I mean, this is basically what New Year's resolutions are. Right? Good plans, no power. It's like a weight loss goal, some new clothes, a gym membership. It's going well the first week of January. The second week, it's like, "I forgot how good Papa Johns stuffed crust tastes." Then here we are in May, and you still have the new clothes, and they kind of work because there's an elastic waistband. Good plans, no power.

Sometimes it's a little bit more serious than that. Maybe it's like you meant your vows to your core on your wedding day before God and all of the witnesses, but then a few years later, it's like you didn't realize how uninteresting you'd find your spouse. Anyway, what Peter does is so relatable, so human, so sinful. We all know what happens. Jesus is arrested, and Peter is scared to death.

Then three times, just like Jesus said... It's like Jesus never met the guy. The third time... I actually want to read this to us from Luke's gospel. It says this as he's doing it the third time: ***"And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.'"***

Jesus is across the way, across the courtyard, and he sees him do it the third time. They see each other. Painful. ***"And he went out and wept bitterly."*** Peter runs out and starts bawling. His whole world falls apart between dinner and bedtime. He's totally ashamed. He's totally confused. Peter fails big time.

Now the stage is set for an epic comeback, because we know that in the end Peter is the one who leads the early church after Christ ascends. His shame and weakness are traded for purpose and power. How does that happen? This is what we're talking about today. We're going to see the road map to restoration, how he architects the comeback. He does five things.

This is very helpful to any of *us* who might feel down and out, because we can do the same things to architect our own personal comeback. Let me just say that this sermon isn't just for giant sinners; this sermon is for all of us. Actually, let me edit that. This sermon *is* just for giant sinners; therefore, this sermon is for all of us. If you don't see yourself as a giant sinner, we're going to talk about that in a minute. So, now the stage is set. Let's start reading.

Chapter 21, verse 1, says, ***"After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias..."*** So, now he's alive, and he's revealing himself again. He has already done it. ***"...and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together."***

All right. That was the first step. You're like, "What? I missed it." *Engage community.* After you fail, you need to continue to engage your Christian community. What's Peter doing? Let's fill in the timeline a little bit more. Sunday morning, when the women run back from the empty tomb, they run to their Community Group, and who's there? Who showed up with all his shame and confusion? Who still showed up? Peter.

Now here we are a couple of days later, and he's doing life with his Christian brothers. The temptation after a failure is to withdraw from community. And I know why we do this. Withdrawal feels like a retreat to safety, but it's actually a retreat *from* safety. Withdrawal after a failure can lead to absolute ruin.

How do I know this? Well, that actually plays out with another one of Jesus' friends, this guy Judas. He failed pretty big time too, but he didn't show up to Community Group on Sunday morning. He goes out with the profit he made, buys some real estate, and hangs himself. He withdrew into his own destruction. This is the temptation.

Some of you guys might be tempted to do this. You might be doing this right now, withdrawing into your own destruction. You think you're going into self-protection mode, but you're actually going into self-destruction mode. You think, "Oh, I need a new Community Group." No, you need to keep showing up, and you need to start opening up.

I've seen the counter-vision of this play out too many times...recently, unfortunately. There's a married couple in a Community Group. Only one is showing up for a little season, and then *that* one isn't showing up as much in the next season, and then a crisis text goes out. "I think my marriage is falling apart."

The retreat is not protective; it's destructive. So, if you're doing this, stop doing this. Don't do this. You at least need to show up and look sad so that somebody asks you what's going on. It might feel embarrassing to do that, but it's definitely more embarrassing long term to have your life blow up.

So, step one, if you're going to make a comeback, is to engage your Christian community. Peter is doing this. What else? Let's keep reading. Verse 3: ***"Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.'"*** We see here Peter is kind of a natural leader. "I'm going fishing." These guys are like, "Yeah, we'll come with you, Peter."

"They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, do you have any fish?' They answered him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish."

Then the disciples recognize that this is Jesus, and Peter...classic Peter...jumps in the water and swims to Jesus on the shore. The other guys row in, and they have a

seafood breakfast on the beach. Then we're going to skip down to verse 14. There's so much going on in this chapter.

Verse 14 says, ***"This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead."*** Then we're going to camp out in verse 15 for a while. ***"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.'"***

This is the second step if you're going to make a comeback: *Stop lying*. Start being honest. You have to be honest about where you're at. Okay. How is Peter doing this? Well, let's remember. A couple of days ago, at the Last Supper, Peter was not being honest with himself. He was like, "Jesus, I'm ready to die for you." He was radically overstating his devotion to Christ, and Jesus was like, "No, Peter. You're not being honest with yourself."

Now here we are a couple of days later, and he's deciding to see himself with a bit more sober judgment. It's not clear, actually, in the English in verse 15 that he's doing this, but the Greek unlocks it for us. This is so interesting. Check this out. In the English, there's only one word translated for *love* here...*love*. Jesus asks, "Do you love me?" and Peter is like, "Yes, Lord. I love you."

But in the Greek we have a couple of options. When Jesus asks the question, he says, "Peter, do you *agape* me?" which in the Greek is the highest form of love. This is unending, unbreaking, covenantal devotion and affection. It would be natural for Peter to say, "Yes, Lord, I *agape* you," but that's not what he says. He says, "Yes, Lord. You know that I *phileo* you." That's a lower level of love. That's good friend love.

Peter is saying, "Yes, Lord. I'm definitely committed to you right now, but who knows down the road." This is very interesting. He goes out of his way to do that. You could take this a couple of different ways. You could take this as a sign of Peter's lack of devotion to Christ. I don't know. Maybe you should, but I think we should give Peter a little bit more credit than that here.

I take this as a sign of his newfound humility and honesty, because a few days ago, he was caught radically overstating, not being honest with himself. Now here we are, a couple of days later, after he embarrassed himself, and he's like, "Jesus, honestly, I'm trying to love you, but clearly I'm not great at it." He's being a little bit more self-aware, a little bit more honest with himself.

This is step two. You have to stop lying to yourself. Oh my goodness. I could preach a whole sermon just on this point, because people lie all the time. *All* the time. We lie to

three groups of people. We lie to ourselves, we lie to other people, and we lie to God. Let's start with ourselves. It's hard to be honest with yourself.

How many of you guys can relate to this? You step on a scale for the first time in a couple of months. You're kind of like, "Ooh." You don't really like the number. You step off. "That can't be right." You do it again. Same number. Like, "What the heck? Where's the reset button? I've got to recalibrate this bad boy. That's got to be it." You empty your pockets, go to the bathroom, and do it again.

The scale is fine. It's telling you the truth, but it's hard to be honest with yourself. Look. It's not great to lie to yourself about your weight, but it's worse to lie to yourself about your character and, unfortunately, that's actually a lot easier to do. Why is that so easy to do? Well, a couple of reasons.

First of all, people don't like feeling terrible about themselves. Obviously, it's more fun to feel like an awesome person than an awful person, so people lie to themselves about how great they are. The second reason is it's actually hard to know the truth about your own character. It's hard to know your own motives sometimes. Furthermore, sometimes you have multiple motives for any given action.

For example, maybe you want to watch a show on Netflix to end your day, and you have a couple of motives, a couple of reasons, for doing that. You find the plot very interesting and imaginative. Great motive. You want to relax. That's a fine motive. You'd like to stumble upon scenes of good-looking naked people, and this particular show affords you that opportunity. Terrible motive. That's a terrible motive.

Like, it would be helpful, though kind of painful, if you could step on a character scale after your late-night Netflix and that scale said back to you, "You watched that in order to see the sex scene. That's what you were trying to do." Or after your ladies' night, if you could step on a character scale that said back to you, "You told them that story about your husband to get them to hate him and love you, kind of feel sorry for you. That's why you said that."

Now look. The character scale doesn't exist (fortunately or unfortunately, I'm not sure); therefore, people have a terrible time being honest with themselves. I understand why we do this. It helps us cope, but it's really not helpful in the least. Why isn't it helpful? Well, here's why: to the extent you lie to yourself, you leave reality. Truth is simply that which corresponds to reality, and lying is a departure from reality. You go to this alternate universe, this place that isn't real.

This is how it goes. I mean, for people introspective enough to know what's happening, this is what's happening. They evaluate themselves, and they're like, "Oh,

I don't like real me. Real me is terrible. I like fake me better." A lot of times, people don't know this is happening, but under the hood, this is what's happening.

Then it starts to get really problematic, because once you decide you like fake you better, you start to think, "I bet other people are going to like fake me better too," and then you take the jump and start lying to the second category: other people. Fake you isn't just in your head; fake you shows up to the office. Fake you shows up on the first date. Fake you shows up to coffee with your friends. We're desperate to be liked, desperate to impress, so we lie.

We do this in so many different ways. We embellish answers in interview questions to land a job. It's as simple as we edit our stories from our day to remove some of our shameful actions, and then edit them a little bit more to add in some elements of heroism, and then it works. They like you. You impress them.

But problem: it's fake you, and fake you can't have real relationships. It's obvious, but it's profound. To the extent that it's fake you, you can't have a real relationship. Real you is still here unaccepted and unaffirmed, and now it's worse because real you is unknown and growing more desperate to be accepted. It's a terrible cycle.

So, we have to stop lying to ourselves, we have to stop lying to other people, but most of all, we need to stop lying to God. This is why self-righteous people exist. A self-righteous person is simply a person who lies to God about how great he is, about his own character. I mean, you get people who think preposterous things, like, "God must be pretty pleased to have a guy like me on his team. I'm better than the other guys."

This is Peter at the Last Supper. "Jesus, even if *they* all fall away, I never will." A self-righteous person isn't being honest with himself and not being honest with God about his own character. This isn't for all of you, but some of you are doing this, and you need to stop doing this. You think you're doing great, and you're doing terrible.

You feel good about yourself because you have more socially acceptable sins, but your sins are just on the privacy of your iPhone screen or in a darker place, the depths of your heart. You're nice to her face, but in *here* you kind of despise her. You wish terrible things on her. You can't even admit that to yourself. We've already talked about why.

The truth is if you could step on the character scale, you would turn out to be worse than you thought. It's kind of depressing, but that's just the truth. He's holier than you can imagine. I realize I've probably already offended some of you, and I'm just going to go ahead and go all the way. Hang with me, because good news is coming, but bad news first. I'm being serious.

Some of you need to realize you're lost before you can get found. Some of you need to go and think and journal about it for a while this week. You need to come to terms with your own depravity. You need to get introduced to real you. You need to get overwhelmed by real you. You need to admit to yourself all of the terrible motives you have for all of the socially acceptable things you do.

I know what you're thinking. "Pass. Sounds terrible. I don't want to do that. Also, why did you just get so mean all of a sudden?" Hear my heart. I'm not trying to be mean. I promise I'm not trying to be mean. I'm not trying to hurt; I'm trying to help. How is this helpful? Here's how. Look at me, guys. This is so important. It's going to be better for you to be overwhelmed by your own depravity this week than it will be to be surprised by it on judgment day.

Then right there, when you're completely overwhelmed and like, "Oh my goodness. I'm in trouble. I'm in trouble..." Right there, you need to take the third step in making the comeback. You need to *meet with Jesus privately*. By John 21, Peter has actually already done this. It's not clear as you read right through John, but when you piece together the rest of Scripture, it becomes clear.

First Corinthians 15 says that Jesus appeared first to Peter, and then to the Twelve. So he has already had a private meeting with Peter. The Bible doesn't say a lot about what happened in this private meeting between real Peter and the risen Jesus, but I would imagine that there was a receiving of the gospel, probably something like this.

Peter is sitting there, awfully surprised that Jesus is alive, awfully ashamed of himself, and Jesus is saying, "Peter, I know. I saw you across the courtyard, and I know, but before I called you three years ago I knew you were going to do that." He's like, "Yeah, you failed to die with me, but I didn't fail to die for you. Your failure can stay buried in my grave if you take it."

This is the gospel. It's so surprising. It's not "If you're a good boy for a while and perform..." No, no, no. "It can stay buried in my grave if you'll take it." It's a gift. Let me slow down here, because this is it. For some of you guys, this is it. You didn't know it, but this is why you came this morning. This is the gospel.

I just spent a minute speaking pretty directly with self-righteous people. I'm going to take another minute to speak a little bit more gently with those of us who are painfully aware we've done something scandalous. I don't know what it was. It could have been a million different things. In a room this size, it *is* a million different things, deep things, real things.

It's the pregnancy you decided to end 15 years ago. You never told anybody about it. You never really met with Jesus about it. Not for real. It's just down there. It's the

young lady you slept with in college after she was too drunk to know what was going on. You never talk about it. You haven't thought about it in a long time. You're pretty upset with me for bringing it up right now, but you never really met with Jesus about it. Not for real. Not real you.

Here's a question: Why not? Well, I think the answer is... And this is deep. It's too real for some of us to admit to ourselves, but I think it's the truth. I think you think he hates you for it. You don't think he'll love you. You think, in that private meeting between real you and the risen King, it's going to be an absolute tongue lashing or worse. So it's like, "Lock it up. Lock it away." You perform and put time and good works between your past and your present, but deep down you know he knows, and it's not working.

Look, guys. For so many of us, this is the hardest thing to do in Christianity: to believe that he actually loves real you. Not fake you, not the one who shows up smiling and singing...*real* you. But if you're ever going to make a comeback, you need to meet with Jesus privately about those things, and you need to hear him say...

Some of you need to hear me say this. You need to hear somebody say this. "I know. It's okay. I know, but I've always known. Two thousand years ago, before you existed, I knew. I put it on my back, and I died in your place, but I'm alive again, and that failure can stay buried if you'll take it. You can't earn it. You have to take it. It's a gift."

Look, guys. We're all in the same boat...self-righteous people, scandalous sinner. Not one of us is going to heaven based on our goodness. The only person doing that is Jesus, and we're only going if he takes us with him. It does not depend on our lousy character, my lousy character, Peter's lousy character, your lousy character; it depends upon his grace.

You don't earn it; you take it, and if you do for real, the comeback is on. It's completely inevitable at that point. Your love for him will start to grow proportionate to the forgiveness you've received. Your need to lie and impress other people starts to fade away. Let me explain what this looks like. It's kind of hard, but I'll try.

I had the opportunity to worship with some of our brothers at the Forsyth County prison a couple of months back. It was an incredible experience. The worship in there was unbelievable. I don't mean the lighting was amazing or the sound system. It wasn't. I mean the joy in that room, the love for God in that room, the spirit of worship.

Many beautiful sanctuaries across the world today will not achieve what was achieved in that room. How did that happen? How did they achieve that? Well, here's how. For those guys, "fake me" didn't show up to worship; "real me" showed up. They

weren't trying to impress anybody. They're not coming in there in a nice car with nice clothes on. They all walk in there in the same green prison clothes. *All* of them.

They're like, "Who am I kidding? I'm in prison, man." They're not trying to impress each other. Their situation has made it impossible to lie to themselves anymore, and then they go to an amazing Savior, and they're like, "Look. If you could love me, *this* version of me, *real* me, the one in prison, that would be the best thing ever," and they've heard him say, "I do." They've experienced great forgiveness, and they have proportionately great love and joy. If you were in the room, you could feel it.

For some of you guys, the problem with your public joy is that your public image is still kind of too clean. It's fake you. Okay. I'm going to make an extreme statement. I realize it's extreme. Then I'm going to walk it back, but follow me here. For some of you guys, you would act so much more free... Not *be* so much more free. You're already free. But you would act so much more free if all of your sins were broadcast all over social media tonight, just out there.

Follow me here. Don't do this. That's not safe. Don't do that. Okay? But think about Peter. Peter's greatest failure, absolutely pulling the seat out from underneath his best friend Jesus Christ and literally leaving him to die, is recorded in all four of the Gospels. Not two of them or three of them...all four.

I mean, Peter has to fire his agent. Right? All four gospels? That's some bad PR. He wants to be a church leader. How is he going to get a book deal for 1 and 2 Peter now? But seriously. You would not be able to broadcast your failure as widely as Peter has broadcast his failure.

Some of you guys... You don't need to tell everybody, but you haven't told a soul, and you're carrying the shame around your neck like an anchor and just walking through life with it. You need to tell somebody, a good Christian friend. I know why we don't. It's like, "Oh, if they know, they'll reject me." No, that's a lie. A real Christian will not. They will not. If they've really experienced the grace of God, they love another Christian's comeback story. They resonate with it. It's their story.

Or maybe we're afraid we'll be disqualified for future ministry or leadership. I don't know. Was Peter disqualified? What about that other giant sinner, that guy Paul? No, quite the opposite. Look. I won't belabor the point any more than I already have. I'm just saying that sometimes when we're afraid of getting found out, we are afraid of the very thing that could give us a ton of freedom.

So, Peter has come to realize and accept this, and he's not self-righteous anymore; he is self-aware and Savior-dependent. His affections are feeble, like we talked about. They're feeble, but they're for Jesus. He's in a vulnerable state, and it's so surprising.

It's in this vulnerable state that Jesus tells him to take the next step. Let's read it. Verse 17. So, he does this thing three times.

"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.'"

Step four: *"Feed my sheep."* Part of Peter's healing is going to be helping other people. This is what a disciple is. A disciple is someone who follows Jesus and helps others find and follow Jesus. Jesus says, "Feed my sheep."

It's so interesting. He doesn't say, "Hey, Peter, you know what? You failed big time. Sit on the bench for five years, and then if you're a good boy, I'll give you some super-low-level job to do." No, it's "Hey, Peter, you failed big time, but I've forgiven you big time. It's done. It's time to move on, because I'm about to leave, and you need to take care of my people." Jesus says, "Feed my sheep."

Okay. What does this mean exactly? First of all, who are the sheep? The sheep are Christians. That's actually an easy answer. The sheep are Christians. Okay. What is the food? The food is the Word of God. When the Word of God is believed and gets into a Christian, he is nourished by it and grows up spiritually. That's what we're talking about here.

Okay, another question: Which sheep is God calling Peter to? Actually, better question: Which sheep is he calling *you* to or what sheep is he calling *me* to, or any given person? Well, that's a little bit harder, and I can't answer it for everybody. Everybody has a unique answer to *that* question, but I think it's helpful, as we think about that for ourselves, to think about a couple of categories.

The first category is your family. It's actually an easy answer if you're a parent. Which sheep? If you're a parent, it's those kids. Those are the sheep God gave you. There's nobody else; it's you. Own it. Take personal responsibility for their spiritual nourishment.

The second category is your church family. We have a big ol' family of sheep here at Two Cities, and feeding them means a lot of different things, and we all have a role to play. I want to give us a framework for how we think about this at Two Cities. We'll start at the middle and kind of move out a little bit.

The primary way we think about this is through the teaching ministry of this church, primarily *this*, the Sunday sermons. We're painstaking in our approach to the Sunday

sermons. Pastor Kyle leads it. Praise the Lord. He spends all week in the kitchen, so to speak, preparing a meal to put on the table for us every weekend.

I'm going to take off my elder hat and put on my "friend of Pastor Kyle" hat for a second. Actually, I want my elder hat on too. I have two hats on, elder and friend of Pastor Kyle. None of you guys have any idea how hard it is to do what Kyle does every weekend. He is pouring his life into feeding you the Word of God. Is he perfect at it? Almost. No, but he's pretty good at it. Right?

I know so many of you guys know this, and you appreciate him so much. It's okay to tell him that, by the way. You can tell him that. That would encourage him. But sometimes... Hear my heart in this. This is for, like, 1 percent of you. Kyle would never say this. I'm going to say it. Sometimes I'll hear a comment. It's like, "Ugh, that was a little offensive."

"Did that offend you?"

"Well, not me, but this other group over *here*."

It's like, "Okay." Let's keep our meal analogy. "That was a little spicy this week, a little salty." I'm just like (kindly), "*You* do it. *You* work all week to put a meal on the table for 3,500 people that hits all of their flavor palettes exactly correctly and is compassionate but also convictional and super relevant but super faithful to the text and hits the older folks and the younger folks." It's kind of hard to do.

Just hear my heart in this, guys. I'm not saying there's not room for feedback. There is. There's also a lot of room for encouragement too. Pastor Kyle is pouring his entire life...it's his life's work...to feed you the Word of God. Pray for him and encourage him wherever you can.

So, the first way we think about it at our church is the teaching ministry, and the second way we think about feeding the sheep is through smaller meals that we have throughout the week, our Community Groups. In homes throughout our city, we have these smaller meals where the Community Group leaders are thinking about "Is the nourishment getting into the sheep? Like, are they growing up spiritually?"

You might be like, "Well, I thought you said I had a role to play. I'm not the lead pastor. I'm not a Community Group leader. What's my role?" As we go on from there, there's a lot more. I don't have time to talk about all of it. There are a lot of sheep in our kids' ministry over there. I don't know if you've noticed. There's some over there. We have some in our youth ministry, our college ministry.

I'm just saying go own something. Who? I don't know. Pray, guess, go. Go take personal responsibility for somebody else's spiritual nourishment. I mean, a lot of us have benefited from decades of somebody else doing this for us. Right? Grandma's prayers invested into us. She took responsibility.

Mom and Dad's godly parenting fed into us. Your youth pastor, your current Community Group leader and pastors... It might be time for you to take personal responsibility for somebody else's spiritual nourishment. That's part of the process if you're going to make a comeback. "Feed my sheep." What else? Verse 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.' (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.)"

Intense. Jesus is so intense. This is very interesting, because a few days ago, Peter was like, "I'm ready to die for you." Jesus was like, "No, you're not ready for that." Now here we are a few days later, and Jesus is like, "Actually, you know what, Peter? One day you *will* die for me." This is obviously discouraging, but I think it's actually encouraging, as well, for a couple of reasons.

First of all, I don't know if you noticed, but it says, "When you are old this will happen." Peter is probably in his late 20s, plus or minus, in this conversation, and he gets an indication that he probably has awhile. I guess that could be encouraging. But more seriously and more importantly, Jesus is prophesying here that Peter is going to have an epic comeback.

A few days ago, his faith couldn't stay awake for Jesus. One day, his faith will come back to the point where it will give the ultimate sacrifice for Jesus. His love for Christ will one day come back and surpass his love for his own life. How's that going to happen? Let's keep reading.

Verse 19 again: ***"(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, 'Follow me.'"*** There it is. That's the last step. Step five: *"Follow me,"* the last step if you're going to make a comeback. What's interesting about *this* one is it was also the first step. Remember our first sermon in the series? The first thing Jesus ever said to Peter was "Follow me." Well, here it is. It's the last thing. That's because this is a continual step. You have to do this one every day. "Follow me."

It's interesting. Jesus doesn't say, "Hey, Peter, I'm about to leave, so follow this map." No, it's still *"Follow me,"* not a map. It's not *"Follow that path";* it's *"Follow this person."* So often, we get worked up about the path. It's like, "Which job? What

college? Which girl? What's the path?" That's a fine question, but it's not the best question. Who's the person? That's the better question.

Listen, guys. If I could just speak personally for a second, I kind of have no idea how I've ended up where I am in life. Well, I hope I haven't ended up, like I'm about to die or something. Truly, I don't know the path I took to get to this moment right here. The path doesn't really make sense to me.

I don't do a lot of trying to map out my life. I used to try a little bit. It wasn't going great, so I stopped doing that. What seems to me to be a more biblical and, frankly, less maddening approach is to just be resolved to follow Jesus every day, whatever I know that means.

I had an experience about 10 years ago that really affected how I think about this. My wife and I were at The Summit Church and had a guest preacher come into town, a guy by the name of David Platt. I guess when you're The Summit you get David Platt to come in when your pastor is out of town. Sorry, guys. We're working on it. Okay? We'll get there one of these days, maybe. I don't know.

At any rate, David Platt comes in. If you don't know who he is, he's awesome, but he's a pretty intense guy. I remember that sermon absolutely wrecking me. I wasn't sure I was a real Christian after that sermon. I'm serious, man. That sermon was some version of "If the gospel is actually true, how have you not already sold all your stuff and moved overseas to take it to the nations?"

I'm sure he didn't say it exactly like that, but that's what I felt. That's what 25-year-old me heard. I was having a hard time after that sermon. I was like, "I don't know if I'll do anything for Jesus, honestly." I was talking with my wife that Sunday afternoon, having a hard time, and she was like, "I think you just need to go on a walk and talk with God about it."

Maybe I was being a little bit insufferable and she was trying to get rid of me. I don't know. Anyway, that's what I did. It was good advice. I remember walking around our apartment in Mebane just trying to be real me and talk with the Lord about it. Like, "God, I don't want you to ask me to do something super hard. I don't know if I'll do it. I love you. I'm trying to love you." Real me. And he met me there. He's so kind.

He was like, "Son, I'm not asking you to do all that right now. I *will* ask you to do harder things later, but not today. Today, just follow me today. Just do what you know that means today. Keep seeking me daily in the Word today. Keep loving your wife, keep leading your Community Group, and I'll keep changing you, then one of these days, you'll be ready."

Ready for what? I don't know. That's the point. I don't know. Twenty-five-year-old me had no idea that one of the things he was going to get me ready for was preaching to you guys this weekend, but here we are. Twenty-five-year-old me was not ready to preach to you guys this weekend, but here we are. How did I get ready? I don't know.

I don't know the path I took. This is my point. The path doesn't even make sense to me. Guys, look. I'm just a normal person. I'm going back to work at my bank job this week. (Actually, I'm not. I'm taking next week off, to be completely honest with you guys.) Truly, I'm just a normal person. I don't know the path I took to get here, but hear me. This is it. I don't know the path, but I do know the person. I know who I follow.

I don't want to be a hero, guys. I'm not trying to be the hero of my own story. I've never done it perfectly one day in my life. This is all I'm trying to say. If real you and real me are resolved to follow the risen King every day, at a church our size, a decade from now... You wouldn't believe it if he told you.

The kingdom of God is going to come down. How could it not? I wonder what he's going to do for you, do *through* you. I wonder what he's going to write into your comeback story. Some of you guys are completely discouraged about someone far from God and close to you, and you're going to baptize them next year. It's going to be awesome.

Some of you guys are wrapped up in so much shame that you struggle to show up at Community Group, and you're going to be free of that one day, and you're going to be leading a group. It's going to be awesome. Some of you guys are anonymous Christians at the office. It has been like that for a decade. A decade from now, you're going to be the absolute aroma of Christ in that place.

Some of you guys are going to change your schools. Some of you guys are going to the nations. You're not ready today, but you *will* be. How's it going to happen? Follow him today. Just be resolved to follow him today. Those comeback stories, from the depths of sin that used to bind you and me up to the heights of kingdom impact, an adventure he's going to call us into... It's going to be fun to watch.

Would you guys go ahead and bow your heads and close your eyes? Here's how I want to end. I just want to set up for a minute a private meeting between real you and the risen King. There are two types of meetings that need to be had.

The first one is... Some of you guys just need to receive his grace. Real you needs to do it. You know the thing you haven't talked with him about that you need to talk with him about. You know the motives. You thought about them 20 minutes ago. You just need to talk with him about it. Real you needs to hear him say, "I still love you."

Some of you need to receive his grace. For others of you, if nothing is coming to mind, I just want you to remember his grace. Not receive it but remember it. Just sit here and remember all of the times and all of the things he has saved you out of, and thank him for it. We're going to do that for a minute, and then I'm going to pray. So go ahead. Just real you and the risen King.

[Pause]

Merciful Savior, risen King, we just receive your grace. We just receive it. We just cling to it. We just hold on to it, none of us doing it in a small way, all of us doing it in a huge way. Great forgiveness. Help our resolve to follow you today. Lord, we're going to stand and sing now, and we're going to sing like people who have experienced great forgiveness, like our brothers at the Forsyth County prison. We're going to sing like people who have experienced great forgiveness.