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# Jesus Forgives Peter

*Scripture: John 21:1-19*

**Theme: Jesus restores us when we fail Him**

*Jr High (Ages 12-14)*

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Free curriculum for small and rural churches

## Lesson Overview

Lesson Title: "When You Mess Up, God Doesn't Give Up" (Jesus Forgives Peter , John 21:1-19) Hook & Story: Imagine you're playing a super-important game of basketball with your team, but halfway through, you drop the ball three times in a row. You're frustrated, everyone's looking at you, and you just want to quit. That's kind of how Peter felt after Jesus was arrested, he denied Him three times, and his heart was heavy. But here's the thing: Jesus didn't walk away. Instead, He stood up from the fire and asked Peter a question: "Do you love me?" (John 21:15). That's not just a test of love, it's a restart button. God doesn't erase our mistakes; He gives us a second chance because He knows failure isn't the end... it's where we learn to trust Him more. Key Truth: Jesus forgives us when we mess up, just like He forgave Peter. That's why God calls us to do the same: When someone falls short, give them grace, not a lecture. Maybe today, someone in your life has let you down. Will you reach out and say, "I'm sorry, let's start fresh?" That's how Jesus worked in Peter's life, He didn't keep score; He kept us. Life Application: Ask: What's one way I can extend grace today? Maybe it's asking a sibling for forgiveness, apologizing to a friend, or just reminding yourself: God's love isn't tied to our perfection, it's tied to His promise. And that promise is for you. (P.S. Petitions: "Lord, help me believe like Peter, when I stumble, remind me You're there to restore, not reject!") Optional reflection: children can draw a picture of Jesus helping their friends, then share one way they can help someone else this week. This extra activity supports the lesson's theme and gives teachers a simple, lowprep option for extending the discussion.

## Bible Story

Title: "The Third Morning After the Denial"

After the terrifying events of the night before, Jesus appeared to His disciples one last time before His ascension. The morning had begun with an empty tomb and a shocked Peter, who had boldly declared, "I will never deny You!" (Matthew 26:33) but had backed out in the heat of the moment. Now, two days later, Jesus was walking along the

shore of Lake Tiberias, and Peter's heart was still heavy with shame and confusion. He had seen the risen Lord, but he still carried the weight of his betrayal. The other disciples had been fishing all night, exhausted and hungry, but Jesus was there waiting, just as He always does, even when we mess up.

Peter couldn't believe his eyes when he saw Jesus standing on the shore. He had expected to be abandoned, but instead, He invited the disciples to join Him for breakfast. When Peter saw Jesus, he must have been overwhelmed by the mix of relief and fear. He couldn't take it back, they all knew how he had cried, "I don't know this man!" But now, Jesus looked at him with a gentle smile. "Do you love Me more than these?" Peter, quick to feel guilty, said, "Yes, Lord, You know I love You." (John 21:15) Jesus didn't scold him. He simply asked the same question again, and again. Peter felt his stomach clench as he replied, "Yes, Lord, You know everything about me." Jesus' answer was clear: "Feed My sheep." (John 21:17)

Peter had failed Jesus badly, but this wasn't the time to run away or hide. Instead, Jesus gave him a mission, to care for His people, to shepherd them with love. Peter's heart raced, not because he was proud, but because he finally saw Jesus' forgiveness. He had spent years pretending he was strong enough, but now he had to live out what he had denied. The other disciples were still confused, but Peter knew: Jesus didn't just want his words back; He wanted his heart. His failure wasn't erased, it was redeemed. In that moment, Peter realized something powerful: God doesn't ask us to be perfect. He asks us to keep trying.

This story matters because it's true. We all mess up, sometimes big, sometimes small. But Jesus doesn't throw away His friends when they fail. He forgives, He restarts, and He gives us a new chance. His command to Peter was the same for all of us: "Go and tell others what I have done for you." (John 21:19) Whether we're leading a group, serving in church, or just trying to be better in life, God calls us to love others as He loves us. His forgiveness isn't a free pass, it's a call to action. So if you've failed today, ask Him to help you start again. And when you do, remember: He's already forgiven you. Now, it's time to feed His sheep, because that's what He's done for you.

--- Life Application Questions: 1. Have you ever failed in a big way? How did you feel when you realized you'd done something wrong? 2. Jesus didn't punish Peter for his betrayal, He asked him to serve instead. What's one way you can serve others this week? 3. God doesn't ask us to be perfect. He asks us to try. How can you show that kind of heart to someone today?

## Key Verse

### John 21:17 , 'Feed My sheep.'

Here's how to make it clear, real, and relatable for your junior high friends: "Jesus looks at Peter, Peter, who tripped up a bunch of times (like when he denied Him three times!), and says: 'Peter, you're my best friend. You're the one who'll help spread my love to others. Not just talk about it, but act on it. Take care of my people, my sheep (the people He loves like His kids), the way I would. Feed them with kindness, love, and truth. Like you're their breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Keep them strong, watch over them, and show them the same love Jesus gave you.'" Why it matters: Peter's heart was bruised, he'd failed Jesus big time, but Jesus didn't toss him aside. Instead, He gave him one last mission: be a shepherd to others. Life's hard, but God's calling you to step up, not just as a follower, but as someone who helps others thrive like Jesus does. Question: What's one way you can 'feed' someone else this week, like with a kind word, a helping hand, or just being there? Life App: Shepherds don't just watch over sheep, they care for them. Who needs your love right now?

## Activities

### Activity 1:

1. Set the Scene (2 min)
2. "Last Sunday, Peter sure didn't deny Jesus. But on that rooftop? He lied three times. Today, we're not just reading about that, we're acting it out. Jesus didn't throw Peter out; He said, 'Feed my sheep.' How can you be like that today?"

3. Write three bullet points on the board:
4. "Peter's Denial" (crayon in red)
5. "Peter's Confession" (crayon in green)
6. "What You'll Do Today" (white space).
7. Make Your Posters (5 min)
8. Give each student one sheet and two colors (red for denial, green for confession).
9. Task 1: Draw/Paint Peter's first denial ("I don't know Him!"), use dramatic colors (dark red).
10. Task 2: Draw/Paint his second confession ("I don't know the man!", but with a twist: add a shiver or a sweat drop).
11. Task 3: Write a short prayer or action for today (e.g., "I'll tell my friend I was wrong about X").
12. Build the Chain (5 min)
13. Pair students into 2 groups of 3, 4. Each person in a row will glue their poster onto a long strip of paper (cut into strips beforehand).
14. Challenge: The chain must go from Peter's denial confession YOUR action. If a poster doesn't fit, the group must rewrite it together!
15. "Why does this chain work? Because God forgave Peter, but He also challenged him to keep going. How can we make sure our 'confession chain' isn't just paper?"
16. Discuss & Apply (3 min)
17. "What's one lie or mistake you've kept secret?" (Let one student share anonymously if needed.)
18. Life App: "Peter's story isn't just about forgiveness, it's about repentance. Jesus didn't just say 'go,' He said 'feed my sheep.' What's one way you can 'feed' someone today who's hurt?"
19. Closing: "Today's challenge: Take one step toward confessing a wrong. Write it down or tell someone. Even if it's small, it's huge."

### Activity 2:

1. Read the Passage (2 min)
2. Read John 21:15, 17 aloud: "After this, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you truly love Me?'... Feed my sheep."
3. "Why did Jesus ask Peter three times? Because even after denying Jesus, Peter was still his friend... and Jesus saw him through."
4. Set Up the Game (2 min)
5. Place a big trash can or laundry basket as the "sea."
6. Each student gets a fishing net and 3 slips of paper (write "Sin," "Fear," "Lying" on each).
7. Rule: Only one student can fish at a time (rotate roles).
8. Fish for Sins (3 min)
9. Student 1 picks a slip of paper, puts it in their net, and "casts" it into the "sea" (trash can).
10. "This represents a time you acted like Peter, when you kept a sin secret or lied."
11. Key Question: "How did Peter feel after denying Jesus? How do you think God felt?" (Wait for answers; emphasize God's love.)
12. Reel in Forgiveness (2 min)
13. Student 2 "reels in" their sin, writes it on a green slip, and puts it in a pile labeled "Forgiven."
14. Team Challenge: "Peter's story isn't over! Jesus didn't just forgive him, He chose him to lead others. How can you use your forgiveness to help someone else?"
15. Activity Tie: Have students write down one way they'll "feed" another believer this week (e.g., pray for them, tell them a story of God's grace).
16. Wrap-Up (2 min)

17. "Peter's denial didn't erase his mission. Neither will your 'caught sins.' God's forgiveness is like a net, it gathers us in, then lets us release grace to others."

18. Challenge: "Tomorrow, take one step to confess something small. Then, ask God to help you do something to show His love to someone else."

19. Why These Work for Junior High:

## Discussion Questions

- Lesson: "Jesus Forgives Peter, How Can We Follow His Example?"
- (John 21:1-19)
- Lesson Introduction: The Weight of Failure and God's Unfailing Love
- Imagine you're playing a game where you're given one chance to get it right, but you mess up. Maybe you say something hurtful, skip practice, or make a mistake in front of everyone. How do you feel? Stuck? Defeated? Maybe you even wonder: What if I'll never be good enough? That's exactly how Peter felt after denying Jesus three times, until Jesus showed up with a breakfast of fish and words that still shake the world today.
- Today, we're going to talk about Peter's story, but we're also going to ask: How does Jesus forgiving him challenge us to respond to our own failures?
- Four Open-Ended Discussion Questions
- 1. "Denial vs. Repentance: What Does Peter's Mistake Teach Us About Our Own Struggles?"
- Look back at the story of Peter in John 21. He knew Jesus was the Messiah, even though he didn't understand everything. But when Jesus was arrested, Peter panicked and denied Him three times, like a scared puppy who wags its tail too hard and gets bitten. What kinds of things have you done that made you feel like you "let someone down"? Maybe it was:
  - Saying something mean in anger.
  - Skipping something important (homework, a practice, a prayer).
  - Not showing up when you were supposed to help someone.
  - Peter's mistake wasn't that he was a bad person, it was that he was human. But Jesus didn't stay angry. Instead, He invited Peter to a meal, asked him three times, "Do you love Me?" (John 21:15), and gave him a new mission. If you could ask Jesus one question about your own failures, what would it be? How might His answer change how you see yourself?
- 2. "The Fishermen Who Were Forgiven: What Does Jesus' Action Say About Us?"
- After Peter denied Jesus, he quit fishing and left the group. But Jesus didn't say, "You're out." Instead, He showed up with breakfast, asked Peter three times to feed His disciples, and then sent Peter off with a new mission: "Feed my sheep." (John 21:17).
- Here's the thing: Jesus doesn't just forgive us, He reuses us. The men who were there that night, Peter, Thomas, and the others, had all failed Jesus at some point. But because He loved them, He gave them second (and third!) chances. Think about someone you've wronged, maybe a friend, a family member, or even yourself. How could you restart a relationship (or your own heart) with them, just like Peter did? What would it look like to forgive them first?
- 3. "The Weight of Words: How Does Peter's 'Love' Show Up in Our Lives?"
- Peter's denial was about fear. But Jesus' question to him, "Do you love Me?", was about love returning. That's the beautiful thing: Jesus doesn't ask us to be perfect; He asks us to choose love again and again.
- If you could ask God one thing about how to love someone better, even when it's hard, what would it be? Maybe it's:

- Learning to listen instead of talking when someone's upset.
- Praying for a friend who's struggling.
- Standing up for what's right even when it's uncomfortable.
- How might you show love today, not just when you feel like it, but because Jesus did for you?
- 4. "Peter's New Mission: How Does That Challenge Us to 'Feed' Others?"
- Peter didn't stay on the shore after Jesus forgave him. He got back in the boat and went back to work, not because he was perfect, but because Jesus had a job for him. The same is true for us! Jesus doesn't give us a restraining order; He gives us a resurrection mission.
- Think about your own "mission" right now. Is it:
  - Helping your family?
  - Learning something new?
  - Serving someone who needs you?
- If you could ask Jesus one thing about how to use your talents (even if you mess up along the way), what would it be? How would you answer if He said, "Feed my sheep"?
- Closing Thought: The Invitation
- Peter's story isn't just about what he did wrong, it's about what Jesus did right. He forgave. He restored. He gave a second chance. And He invites you to do the same.
- So today, ask yourself: Where am I carrying the weight of a mistake I've made? Jesus doesn't want you to stay stuck in guilt. He wants you to trust Him, to keep trying, and to trust that He'll use your story, even the parts you don't like, to build something beautiful.
- What's one small step you could take today to respond to Jesus' forgiveness, like Peter did?
- Why These Questions Work:
  - Humanizes the Story: They invite students to see themselves in Peter's struggle.
  - Encourages Action: They push beyond "what happened" to "how can I live differently?"
  - Connects to Life: They tie the Bible lesson to real challenges (friendships, self-worth, forgiveness).
  - Open-Ended: They allow for stories, reflections, and personal growth without "right answers."
  - Would you like any of these adjusted for a specific group or added to a group discussion format?

## Prayer Focus

*Lesson Prayer: "When We Mess Up, He Doesn't Give Up!" (Teacher opens with a quiet moment, maybe while sitting in the same spot where Peter denied Jesus three times in John 21. Ask students to think for a second:) "What's something you've done this week that you regret? Maybe you were angry, said something hurtful, or let down a friend. How do you think Jesus feels when we mess up?" (Pause for reflection, then pray together like this:) --- "Lord Jesus, we come to You not because we're perfect, but because we're your kids, people who sometimes stumble, who sometimes say the wrong thing, or who let our pride get in the way. You already know what we're thinking, how we've let others down or acted like we don't care. But here's what we want: Forgiveness. For You to see us as You say we are, loved, not judged. Help us remember that when Peter denied You three times, You didn't walk away. You came back, asked him again, built him up, and said, 'Will you feed my sheep?' (John 21:15-17). That's the kind of God You are, always reaching back. Give us the courage to ask for forgiveness when we fail, and the humility to trust You when we mess up. Teach us to forgive others like You do, and to never let our regrets stop us from chasing You. Amen." (End with a question:) "Who here would like to share something small they're working on forgiving themselves, or others, for? Let's pray together that God fills it with grace today." --- Why it works for this age: - Relatable struggle: Names their human flaws (anger, pride, regret) without shaming. -*

*Scripture hook: Connects Peter's story to their own "failures" in a way that feels real. - Action step: Ends with an invitation to practice what they're learning, praying for themselves and others. - Hopeful tone: Focuses on God's response to failure (love, not punishment) to counter guilt. Pro tip: Play softly in the background (e.g., a choir singing "What a Friend" or Psalm 130) to make the space feel warm and hopeful.*

### >> Missions Spotlight

In post-genocide Rwanda, the question of forgiveness is not theoretical, it's daily life. Missionaries share that Jesus' forgiveness of Peter shows us how to forgive even the unforgivable. The cross makes forgiveness possible.

### -> To the Cross

Peter had denied Jesus three times. Now, on the beach, Jesus asked Peter three times, 'Do you love Me?' Jesus restored Peter. Because of the cross, when we fail, Jesus doesn't reject us, He restores us. His grace is bigger than our biggest failure.