



# Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

**Galatians**

**Grace for Failures**

**John 20:12-23**

**06/09/2019**

---

## Main Point

Despite our failures, we are met with the grace of Jesus in the gospel.

---

## Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Think of a time in your life when you have experienced failure. How did this affect your posture toward God? How did this affect your relationship with others?**

**Has there been a time where you believed you were failing but were saved from failure by something outside of your control or by the actions of another? How did you respond to this unexpected change?**

Jesus was dead. As much as His followers did not want to believe it, they had seen His body buried. Everything they had given their lives to for the last three years was seemingly done. They must have felt that they had been failed and that they were failures themselves. Today, we will look at the aftermath of Jesus' death and the response of His followers. More importantly, we will see Jesus' response to them in their failure. This changed everything for them—and this applies to our lives now as we face our own failures.

---

## Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 20:12-18.**

**How had Mary failed Jesus in the beginning of this passage? How do her actions show she had failed to remember and believe the words of Jesus?**

**None of us believe the truth about Jesus always and perfectly. How have you responded like Mary when faced with the truth about Jesus?**

Mary had forgotten the words of Jesus, that He had predicted His death and promised that He would rise again. Mary had abandoned her hope in Jesus once she saw Him killed. It's hard to blame her. We are often tempted to abandon hope in much less difficult circumstances! It is easy to forget the faithfulness of God and turn our focus to our circumstances in difficult situations.

**Though Mary did not immediately recognize Jesus, how did He respond to her failure to remember His promises to her?**

**How does Jesus' response to Mary remind you of God's response to the failure of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:9? What does this tell us about God's response to His people in moments of failure?**

Jesus was standing in front of Mary, but in her despair she did not recognize Him. We might expect that His first words would be to lecture her for forgetting what He had said or for her lack of faith. Instead, He asked her why she was crying and who she was looking for. Jesus' question to Mary is similar to God's question to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:9. Despite Adam and Eve's direct failure before God, He did not begin with a word of condemnation, but with a word of care. Jesus revealed Himself to Mary, and she immediately drew near to Him. Her instant response to His grace was to go and tell others.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 20:19-23.**

**How had the disciples failed Jesus? What evidence is there in verse 19 that the disciples had abandoned their hope in Jesus as well?**

**Jesus responded to the failure of the disciples with a reminder of who He was. Seeing Jesus and feeling His wounds brought the disciples much joy. How has being reminded of the gospel brought you joy in past failures?**

Mary's abandonment of hope was subtle, showing up in the form of sadness. The disciples were flat out afraid. They were hiding in a locked room to avoid being killed by the Jews like Jesus was. Their hope was no longer in the man they believed to be the Messiah but the security of man-made barriers. Jesus showed His superiority by completely bypassing their means of protection and, in a moment of intense fear, He brought peace. Jesus brought peace to the disciples by showing them the wounds from His war on death. Even in our greatest failures, we can also have peace because of Jesus' wounds.

# Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Do you have current or past failures that you need to submit to God? How does this passage encourage you to admit your failures before Him? What does today's text tell you about how He will respond?**

**Realizing how Jesus has responded to your failures, how does this enable you to respond to the failures of those around you?**

**The gospel is the ultimate response of grace to the failure of mankind. Who do you know that has faced failure and needs to hear the response of the gospel? How will you pursue that person this week?**

---

## Pray

Thank God that Jesus came so that our failures could be met with grace. Pray for the ability to respond to others with grace as they fail you. Be reminded that God will never fail you and has provided for you completely in the person of Jesus.

---

## Commentary

**JOHN 20:12-23**

20:10-12. The phrase "you will be my witnesses" or "we are witnesses" does not appear in this chapter of John, but the Lord used it in Acts 1:8 and we see it repeated in Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32;

10:39. In all four of those passages, it is always spoken by Peter, and the context always describes the crucifixion and resurrection. But here the primary witness was not Peter but Mary. Peter and John had left, but Mary stayed at the tomb and John offered this loving and passionate account of the first post-resurrection appearance of our Lord. Mary wept as we would over the loss of a dear friend. Then suddenly two angels appeared, and a fascinating conversation took place. We know from Luke's record that Mary had been cured of demon possession (see Luke 8:2) and also had helped support the Lord financially. We must not confuse her with the prostitute of Luke 7 or with Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Empty tomb or not, her grief was unbearable—so deep that she could not take her eyes off the grave to perceive the living Lord.

20:13-14. John records that Mary saw Jesus. She noticed a person standing there, but she had no idea who it was. Many interpreters have wondered about this passage. How could she not recognize Jesus? Certainly there are many plausible explanations. She had experienced deep trauma; her eyes had filled with tears; it was still dark; she was very confused. But perhaps most important, she had not considered the resurrection a possibility. So the idea that she might be talking to a living Christ never occurred to her. She was looking for a body; she did not expect a resurrection.

20:15-16. Mary finally asked the person she thought to be the gardener where the body might be so she could retrieve it. Then Jesus spoke her name and tragedy turned to triumph. The early words of verse 16 remind us of John 10:4 where Jesus said that "his sheep know his voice." This first appearance to a woman shows us the grace and openness of the gospel. This historic narrative describes what really happened. Jesus did not show Himself to Peter and John but spoke first to Mary.

20:17-18. Many ideas have been put forth to explain the words, do not hold on to me. But such conjecture is unnecessary, since Jesus told us this statement was connected with His ascension. The people who love Jesus on earth—beginning with Mary—must learn to live without the physical support of His presence. Mary thus witnessed the resurrection, and her first act upon leaving Jesus was a report to the disciples. It is difficult to know from John's account whether this report or the one in verse 2 was rejected by the disciples. But for whatever reason, the women who believed the reality of the empty tomb could not convince the other disciples what had happened.

20:19-20. The scene now moves from predawn hours to the evening of the same day. The disciples were locked in and riddled with fear in spite of what Peter and John had seen and what Mary had reported. Miraculously, instantly, the Lord appeared to offer them a warm "Shalom." Before they could respond, He showed them the nail prints in His hands and the

spear scar in His side. Why such a display? These fearful believers had to grasp that the same Jesus who died now lived again and stood before them. In the disciples' minds the locked doors protected them to some extent against Jewish authorities who might want to do to them what they had done to their Lord. But in John's view, the locked doors served as a symbolic reminder that nothing can stop or hinder the resurrection body of Jesus.

20:21-23. Again the Father became the center of Jesus' words. He had been a servant on a mission, and now He sent His people out to witness. Most evangelical scholars believe this reception of the Holy Spirit was temporary—an illumination of their hearts for the next fifty days before Pentecost.