

Title: Follow Me**[Slide 1]****Text: John 21:15-23****Peter's Story****Two Kinds of Stories:**

There are essentially two kinds of stories: stories that end well and stories that end badly. The Bible is filled with both kinds of stories.

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The story of David and Goliath takes the form of a U: it begins at the top of the U with David leaving the safety of home to bring food to his brothers who are serving as soldiers on the front lines in a seemingly hopeless confrontation with a vastly superior enemy. David walks right into the middle of the danger and chaos bearing only a slingshot and 5 river stones. Call this moment the bottom of the U. Moments later, he has struck down the enemy champion, Goliath. Israel charges to victory and David becomes a national hero. The story ends at the top of the U again.

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But the story of the man who was king in that story is exactly opposite. It begins, you might say, at the bottom of the U: Saul is crowned king at a time of chaos and foreign domination. He leads his people to victory over their enemies and rose to great power. But then, at the peak of his success he lets his pride and arrogance take over. As a result, he falls into depression and paranoia. His kingdom crumbles around him until he is left, on the night before he commits suicide, making a deal with the devil. The story ends where it began: at the bottom of the U.

Two kinds of stories: and what was true for David and Saul is true for you and me. Which kind of story do we want to live?

Peter's Story:

The night before Jesus died was a night filled with fear and danger – much like the battle lines that faced Goliath. In the middle of the Passover Meal Jesus broke the news that one of the innermost circle of 12 disciples would betray Him to the authorities. When asked which disciple it was, He whispered to John that it would be the person to whom He gave a piece of bread. He gave the morsel of bread to Judas, and Satan emerged out of the shadows to possess him. The die was cast. John ends the scene by saying:

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John 13:30 NIV

As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

All of this was too much for Peter. He longed to be the hero, the one who made things right. When Jesus warned Peter that he couldn't follow him on this journey to death, Peter protested:

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John 13:37 NIV

"Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."

The Upside Down U:

Poor Peter: he thought that the only way to defeat evil was to take matters into his own hands. Jesus tried to warn him that he would end up denying he ever knew Him, but to no avail. Peter was determined to save the day.

Later that night, when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, it was Peter who drew his sword and cut the right ear off the high priest's servant. When all the other disciples ran away, Peter and one other disciple – no doubt John – followed Jesus. He even went into the courtyard of the palace where Jesus was being interrogated.

But when a servant girl put him on the spot, he melted like a pat of butter on a hot stove. Sure enough, *three times* he denied knowing Jesus. And then, just as Jesus had predicted, a rooster crowed. Jesus died that day; Peter did not.

Peter's story was an Upside Down U. It began in fear and danger. Peter took a bold stand – "I will lay down my life for you!" He tried to follow Jesus when He was arrested. But when he found himself facing torture and death, he folded up and slipped away into the night.

A New Direction

The Great Commandment:

The good news is that God doesn't leave us in our broken, upside down stories. No matter how much we mess things up – even when we're trying to fix them! – He offers to come and turn our stories right side up.

For Peter, the turn-around happened when he joined Jesus for breakfast on the beach. After they had finished eating, Jesus asked Peter a question:

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John 21:15 NIV

"Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

Jesus refers to Peter by his family name, not the more familiar nickname that He had given him as a disciple. In some sense, Jesus and Peter are back at Square One.

And when Jesus asks the question about loving more "than these," is there a touch of irony? Peter had boasted of having the greatest love possible for Jesus – even to the point of laying down his life for Him. His boast had suggested that Peter loved Jesus more than the other disciples.

All Peter can say is:

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John 21:15b NIV

"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves him. By the third time, Peter is grieved. Three confessions of love to counteract those awful denials. Peter can do nothing to prove his love; all he can do is say: "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

The Great Commandment is simple and to the point:

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Deuteronomy 6:5 NIV

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

There at the bottom of the U, Peter learns that the only things that matters is that he rediscover his love of God – with all his heart, soul and strength.

The Great Commission:

But there is more to this story than Peter being reconciled to Jesus. Each time that Peter tells Jesus he loves Him, Jesus gives him a future mission:

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John 21:15, 16, 17 NIV

"Feed my lambs."

"Take care of my sheep."

"Feed my sheep."

Jesus entrusts His supreme work to Peter. The Good Shepherd appoints Peter to be a shepherd in His place. This is the same Peter who played the role of the hired hand who saw the wolf and ran away. Now, Peter is a different person – one who will nurture and lead God's People.

A New Direction:

So what is the future for Peter and his story? Jesus points the way forward with a solemn pronouncement:

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John 21:18-19 NIV

"Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go"

Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Peter will not be defined or remembered for his failure. Instead, like his Master, he will bring glory to God, even in the way he leaves this world. He will, like Jesus, be a faithful shepherd who is willing to lay down his life for the sheep.

Follow Me

Find Your Own Story:

We each have to find our own story. It never works to envy or emulate someone else's story. Peter faced that temptation when he learned just what it would mean to be a true shepherd. He looked over his shoulder at that other disciple – the one Jesus loved – and said:

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John 21:21 NIV

"Lord, what about him?"

Ever been there? You see the twists and turns of your story and compare them to someone else who seems to be getting a better deal. "What about him? What about her? Is their story going to be as demanding as mine? Why can't I have things work the way their life seems to be working?"

Jesus' answer to Peter: "Mind your own business."

John 21:22 NIV

"If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

The only way to find the story that turns the U right-side up is to *follow Jesus*.

Follow Me!

So where's your story headed? Who's the hero? Is it "all about you"? Seems that the way it is for most people in our world. Put yourself out there; be your own hero. Show 'em who's boss.

Or are you ready to discover the story that God has for your life?

- It goes down before it goes up. Or perhaps it's better to say that we must first *accept* the reality of our brokenness before we can move forward.
- It's a story that turns our entire being away from Self and focuses us in love for God – love that embraces all our heart, soul and strength.
- It's a story in which we lay our lives down for others.
- And most of all, it's a story of *following, not leading*.

Are you ready for *that story*? Jesus is waiting...with breakfast.