

“Successful Failures, Why Failure Can Be Good” - Psalm 73:25-26 – Thursday, December 31st, 2009

- As we end the year and bring in the new-year, we are inevitably brought face to face with all of our failed resolutions from the past year.
- While we may wish for a “happy new-year,” it’s more likely that our New Year will be met with failure instead of happiness and success.
- I suggest to you that this may actually be good. It is for this reason that I wanted to do this topical study on this, the last day of the year.

- I’ve titled tonight’s topical study; “Successful Failures, Why Failure Can Be Good,” and our text will be Psalm 73:25-26.

Psalm 73:25-26 25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. NIV

- If you were to ask me what one of the most astonishing and fascinating aspects of God’s Word is, it would have to be man’s failure.
- It is so amazing how God will fulfill His purpose in man’s failure. Throughout the scriptures we see examples of this in graphic detail.
- Many of the men and women who were mightily used of God had some really bad problems, and made some really bad mistakes.

One had aptly noted that; “NOAH was a drunk. ABRAHAM was too old. ISAAC was a daydreamer. JACOB was a liar. LEAH was ugly. JOSEPH was abused. MOSES had a stuttering problem. GIDEON was afraid. SAMSON had long hair, and was a womanizer! RAHAB was a prostitute! JEREMIAH and TIMOTHY were too young. DAVID committed adultery and was a murderer. ELIJAH was suicidal. ISAIAH preached naked. JONAH ran from God. NAOMI was a widow. JOB went bankrupt. JOHN the Baptist ate bugs. PETER denied Christ. The Disciples fell asleep while praying. MARTHA worried about everything. MARY MAGDALENE was, well, you know ... The SAMARITAN WOMAN was divorced ... more than once! ZACCHEUS was too small. PAUL was too religious. TIMOTHY had an ulcer ... AND LAZARUS WAS DEAD!”

- Ultimately and amazingly, the failures of all these men and women in the Bible, actually fulfill the purposes of our God.
- Have you ever wondered why we’re given such graphic detail of man’s failures in the scriptures?
- I believe it’s to show us Who God is and how God is with people, and how He works out man’s failures to fulfill His purposes.
- The Bible is not so much about what man does against God; it’s much more about what God does for man.
- David’s sin against God is recorded for us to show us God’s grace for David.

- God’s purpose is fulfilled in man’s failures beginning with Adam. It fulfilled God’s purpose in sending the second Adam, Jesus Christ.
- Sprinkled throughout scripture from front to finish is one true story after another of how God is able to miraculously fulfill His purpose.
- It’s not just that God does it; it’s the way God does it. He fulfills His purpose, not just in spite of, but because of man’s failures.

“Why does God show us the failures of these great leaders? Could it be that He wants us to know that in spite of our fiascos, He can still make something glorious out of our lives? ... I consider Jacob’s biography one of the most interesting of them all. Here is why: Numerous times throughout the Bible, God reminds His people that He is “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:15). In fact, in this same verse, God says, “This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.” Toward the end of his journey God changed Jacob’s name, which means “deceiver,” to Israel meaning “Prince of God.” So, why doesn’t He say, “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and ... Israel”? How strange! How come He associates His name with a cheat who wasted two decades trying to do things his own way? Through His name, His very identity, God wants to say to you and me, “I am still the God who makes failures into Princes of God. I remain the God who takes broken lives – people with multiple divorces, sick in body because of sin, in prison for decades, labeled as losers, crazy folk nobody wants, outcasts with no hope --- and turns them into something beautiful.”

K.P. Yohannan, “It’s a New Day, God’s Answer to Our Failures.” p10

- For this study, I’ve come up with three basic reasons why God will choose to use flawed failures to accomplish His perfect plan?”
- Here they are; “when I fail, first, I’m humble before the Lord, second, I’m dependant on the Lord, and third, I’m glorifying to the Lord.”

1. I’m humble before the Lord

- When we fail, it brings a much needed humility into our lives. Sometimes, God may allow failure for the simple purpose of humbling us.
- Perhaps one of the best examples of this is when Jesus tells Peter that He is praying for him that his “faith may not fail.”(Luke 22:31-34)

Luke 22:31-34 - 31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." 33 But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." 34 Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

- Notice He doesn’t pray that Peter won’t fail, but that Peter’s “faith” won’t fail. Jesus knew that Peter’s courage was going to fail.
- What’s interesting about this is that courage was Peter’s area of greatest strength, which is why the Lord had to humble him.
- God’s purpose in humbling Peter is ultimately fulfilled in Peter’s repeated failures due to his own strength and his own pride.

- Satan gets permission to sift Peter only because it would ultimately serve God’s purpose for Peter in the end.
- The Devil is God’s Devil, and in the process of sifting Peter, God is actually purifying, cleansing and humbling him.
- Those sifting blows and humbling wounds of failure are the catalyst for God granting in His grace a glorious victory and success.

Proverbs 20:30 Blows and wounds cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being.

- Sometimes God gives Satan permission to beat us up and take us down by sifting the pride out.
- In our failures, God uses that sifting to purge and remove the chaff of pride from the wheat of our Christian lives.
- The blow of a failure cleanses away my pride, my reputation, my self-confidence, and my self-righteousness.

"Bondage to reputation can be sheer slavery, and yet did we but know, it is only a form of struggle for our own righteousness. We are unwilling to be known as failures along any line. The trouble with success is that we dare not be failures, for if we are to keep our reputation we cannot admit ignorance or sin. That would be to collapse the sand castle before the tide had even come in. It is better to struggle on even to the breaking point than admit some need that would mean others knowing us as we really are."

Stanley Voke, Personal Revival pp 44-45

Another commentator said it this way; "It is only broken men and women whom God can use. And one way He breaks us is through repeated failures. One of the biggest problems that God has with us is to bless us in such a way that the blessing does not puff us up with pride. To get victory over anger and then to be proud of it, is to fall into a far deeper pit than the one we were in! God has to keep us humble in victory. Genuine victory over sin is always accompanied by the deepest humility. This is where repeated failures have a part to play in destroying our self-confidence so that we are convinced that victory over sin is not possible apart from God's enabling grace. Then, when we do get victory, we can never boast about it."

- There seems to be this common denominator in the scriptures with the men of God that repeatedly failed God. They humbly confessed.
- Moses did after 40 years, Elijah in the cave, David to Nathan, and like Peter they all "turned back," humbled themselves and repented.

- Moses murders an Egyptian and fails God miserably then spends 40 years on the backside of the desert in order to humble him.
- Elijah is so discouraged by his failure, he wants to die, then, God has to humble him by telling him that it's not all about him.
- David fails and falls sexually and murders the husband of the women that he commits adultery with, and covers it up until he's humbled.

- God knows that our sin always looks so much worse on somebody else, so He will show us ourselves using somebody else.
- God will show David his wretched sin by having the prophet Nathan tell him of another man's transgression.
- God will show Jacob his wretched sin by having his father in law Laban out con him while he works for him all those years.

- I can tell you that personally the best thing I ever did was admitting my failure as a husband, father, and even as a pastor.
- The struggle on even to the breaking point was too much to bear and I finally had to humbly admit my own failure.
- To my amazement, I had unspeakable freedom and victory that left me wishing I would have humbled myself and repented sooner.

If you are still mourning and blaming yourself it is not because God is blaming you; He has put the blame on Jesus. It can only be due to one of two things. Either that you have not really repented, or, more likely, you are mourning over your lost righteousness. Perhaps you feel that, having been saved for so long, you should not be failing as you are... You are in effect saying, "Alas for my lost righteousness." That is nothing but pride.

Roy Hession, When I Saw Him, "Where Revival Begins." p63

2. I'm dependant on the Lord

- When we fail, it brings about a much needed dependence upon the Lord. Failure shows us our weakness and our need for His strength.
- Perhaps one of the best examples of this is when God tells King Asa that he will fail because he didn't depend on the Lord.
- What makes his story so tragic is that he was one of Judah's best Kings and one of only nine who were pleasing in the Lord's site.

- God gave him success years earlier when he was dependant on the Lord for victory over the Ethiopian army against impossible odds.
- The failure came when he allied with and relied on Ben-hadad, the king of Aram by getting him to sever his alliance with King Baasha.
- By doing this, he was actually able to defeat the rival army of the northern kingdom, but the problem is that he didn't rely on the Lord.

2 Chronicles 16:7-9 7 At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: "Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. 8 Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the LORD, he delivered them into your hand. 9 For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war." NIV

- When I'm strong, then I'm independent. Failure sort of forces me to both rely on and depend on the Lord to be strong on my behalf.
- Sometimes God will allow us to be brought to that place of utter failure because we're relying on our own strength and our own savvy.

3. I'm glorifying to the Lord

- I believe that God either has, is, or will again and again, bring us to utter failure in and of our self so as to ruin us for Himself.
- God's purpose in man's failure is to bring us to the point where we realize three absolute truths: #1. I can't, #2. He can, #3 let Him!
- Why? So He receives all the credit for my success lest I boast. No flesh can take the credit for what He does in the Spirit.

- Perhaps the best example of this is Gideon. It wasn't just three steps, it was three strikes and he was out because he was a failure.
- He tells God that he's the black sheep of the family, his family is the black sheep of the tribe, and his tribe is the black sheep of Israel.
- This is precisely why God chooses and uses Gideon to and 300 weak and crippled Israelite failures to defeat the 135,000 strong elite Midianite army.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence. NKJV

- This can bring unspeakable hope and encouragement. No matter whom I am or how much of a failure I've been, God can still use me!
- God still loves me, and He's not through with me, because He can still fulfill His purpose in and through me so that it is for His glory.

- Actually, it's sort of a paradox in that our greatest failures can become our greatest successes. There aren't really any shortcuts.
- Show me a Christian who has never failed, and I'll show you that same one has never succeeded.
- I think this principal is personified in none other than the apostle Peter who failed repeatedly even denying the Lord three times.

- You've got to know that Peter thought that God was through with him. After all, he had just failed the Lord by denying him three times.
- Some believe that this is one of the reasons why he went back to his job as a fisherman after he had so miserably failed his Lord.

One commentator said; "Peter and his friends tried all night to catch fish – and failed miserably. They had never had such a bad night in their entire lives. Once God has called you to be His, He won't let you go. He will make sure that you fail at fishing and at anything else you try! You can try as much as you like, but you will fail. God's love won't permit you to waste your life on trivialities. So, if you try to run away from Him, you will be a failure at everything you try wherever you go - until you come back to Him. ...Peter was turning away from the calling of God upon his life and God had to break him once again by making him fail. Those apostles had started fishing at about 6 o'clock in the evening. But Jesus didn't come to them until about 5 o'clock the next morning. The Lord knew that Peter was not going to get any fish that night. Why then didn't He come earlier - as soon as they went out - so that they wouldn't waste their time? Why didn't He come to them at least by 9 o'clock that night? Why did He wait till 5 o'clock the next morning? Why did He wait until they were exhausted, after having struggled for 11 hours and failed? In the answer to that question we discover God's design in allowing us to fail. There we see God's purpose in man's failure. There we will understand why He never came to help us in the past, when we were struggling, despite of our repeated cries for help, and why some of our earnest still remain unanswered. When Peter and his friends went out to fish that evening at 6 pm, ...they were brimming with hope. By 9 pm they hadn't caught any fish, and were perhaps a bit discouraged. But their outing could not still be written off as a "failure". By midnight they may have been quite depressed. By 4 am the next morning, they had begun to lose all hope. But they had still to become **total** failures. For that to happen, they had to fail some more. The graph of their self-confidence was going down. But it had to go all the way down to zero – to rock bottom. And that occurred only at 5 am. Then they were ready to give up. Then they must have said, "It's no use trying any more. Let's go home". That's when the Lord appeared. That is God's way. And the Lord filled their net to overflowing."

- God doesn't allow failure for the purpose of condemnation, rather it's for the purpose of restoration, and that's what's in store for Peter.

John 21:15-18 - 15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." 16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." 17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

- Why does Jesus ask Peter this three times? Because He is restoring Peter after he failed Jesus by denying Him three times.
- Another example of God's restoration instead of condemnation is in the parable of the prodigal son.

As one commentator wrote: "The story of the prodigal son, who wasted so many years, shows us that God gives His best in His restoration of failures. The father said, "Quickly bring out the best robe", for one who had let him down so badly. This is the message of the gospel - a new beginning, not just once, but again and again - because God never gives up on anyone. ...If there is a godly sorrow in your life for all your failures, then even if your sins are like scarlet or red like crimson, not only will your heart be made as white as snow - as promised under the old covenant (Isa. 1:18) - but God promises even more under the new covenant: "I will not remember your sins any more" (Heb. 8:12). Whatever your blunders or failures, you can make a new beginning with God. And even if you have made a thousand new beginnings in the past and have come to failure, you can still make the 1001st new beginning today. God can still make something glorious out of your life. While there is life, there is hope."

Yet I do not advise that we end the year on a somber note. The march, not the dirge, has ever been the music of Christianity. If we are good students in the school of life, there is much that the years have to teach us. But the Christian is more than a student, more than a philosopher. He is a believer, and the object of his faith makes the difference, the mighty difference. Of all persons the Christian should be best prepared for whatever the New Year brings. He has dealt with life at its source. In Christ he has disposed of a thousand enemies that other men must face alone and unprepared. He can face his tomorrow cheerful and unafraid because yesterday he turned his feet into the ways of peace and today he lives in God. The man who has made God his dwelling place will always have a safe habitation.

A.W. Tozer - The Warfare of the Spirit, p. 148