

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, February 26, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

THE MAGNIFICENT JOY OF TRIALS Failure Doesn't Have to Be Final *James 1:2-4, Psalm 103*

The title of the study is “The Magnificent Joy of Trials.” Sound absurd or perhaps at least a little sarcastic? That’s because it probably is to most. There isn’t must that is joyful when you are going through a real trial or struggle in your life. And, although some would say, “This trial is just a joy!” they would most likely be expressing their sarcastic frustration in the midst of that trial rather than some misery loving pleasure experienced from it. There isn’t usually “joy,” gladness, or exuberance associate with trials in our life. But that is exactly what James calls for in the life of a believer in our key text for this study. James 1:2-4 says:

“Consider it pure joy, my brother (and sisters) whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” –James 1:2-4 (NIV)

So true! Maturing in our faith and finding a complete (or whole, full, mature) faith includes times of trial... sometimes great trial. Without them we never really develop... and nobody every escaped the process. We simply cannot become the people God intends us to be without some headaches and heartaches. Of course when troubles and hardships... trials come we can do a couple of things with it:

2 Possible Responses to Trials:

(1) We can grow bitter – The opposite of joy could be bitterness. James says to “Count it all joy whenever you fact trials of many kinds...” I guess the opposite of joy would be the reaction we usually have when life gets hard and the trial mount. We get mad at God, mad at the world and mad at others. We can lash out and allow our pains and disappointments in life to literally defeat and stifle the life out of us. We become bitter.

(2) We can grow better – That’s what James says. He is telling us that for a believer, the trial we experience in this life can actually make us better... they can serve to mature us in the faith so that our faith is complete and not lacking anything.

So the question is how do I develop and mature rather than wilt and die in despair and bitterness when I’m hurting? How do I turn moments of struggle, and hardship, and difficulty into opportunities to develop my faith? Last week we talked about the trial of waiting... we are not usually good “waiters.” We live in fast paced, high energy, get it done now, impatient world. We don’t like to wait, therefore, where our back are against the wall and life forces us to wait it

can be a real challenge for us... a true trial. We looked at David's words in Psalm 62:1-2 (NKJV), *"Truly my soul silently waits for God; From Him comes my salvation.² He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved."* We discovered that when we learn to wait and rest in God in the midst of our trial, we not only find Him taking care of it (the situation)... it is in those moments that we grow in trust and greater reliance on Him, and our joy in the Lord increases as we watch Him work on our behalf.

This week we want to move on in our study to a subject that none of us like... the trial of failure. None of us like to fail! No one does. As a matter of fact, many never try because they are afraid to failure. Failure can be paralyzing to life and can snuff out one's faith and ability to grow and find joy in the Lord. Many fall and fail, never to raise again. Rather, they resign themselves to insecurity and mediocrity refusing to move forward in growth and maturity in their faith. If you look at James' words again in James 1:2-4 and think about what he is saying in reverse image it might look something like this,

"Consider it a pure lack of joy, my brother (and sisters) whenever you face failures of many kinds, because you know that the failures of your faith and in your life develops uncertainty and wavering. Uncertainty and wavering must finish its work so that you may be insecure and incomplete, lacking in confidence and faith to move on and grow." –James 1:2-4 in reverse

C.S. Lewis writes in "The Screwtape Letters,"

"Satan's strategy is to get Christians preoccupied with their failures; from then on, the battle is won." –C.S. Lewis, "The Screwtape Letters"

What do you think of this quote? Do you think C.S. Lewis is right or wrong? What does the quote really mean for a Christian? _____

What Christian cannot identify with the struggles brought on by not having reached goals he had set... or not accomplishing the things he had determined? What Christian is not encumbered and ensnared and oft defeated by that sin that the writer of Hebrews says *"... so easily beset us"* (Heb. 12:1). You know what I'm talking about that sin or area of our lives to which we continually fail. We repent, confess it and turn away from it only to fail again and start the process again... a process that sometimes we are constantly starting over and over and over again.

There are domestic failures, academic failures, romantic failures, spiritual failures, marriages fail, our health fails, our finances fail. We fail at school. We fail at our job. We fail in our walk. And on and on the list goes... failure. We nod in understanding, but surely God has not promised to bless only the successful? He must offer some help to the majority of us who taste defeat... maybe even regularly and handily. And indeed, He does...

Psalm 103 is a Psalm attributed to David. It is the gift of a man who had known the full measure of the unchanging love of a consistent God who knows us yet accepts us as we are and loves us with a love which is not relative to what we are and do.

I. INITIAL FACTS ABOUT FAILURE

Looking into our lives and those of others, it becomes apparent that failure is both accompanied by two peculiar pressures and associated with a major problem.

Two Real Pressures That Accompany Failure:

1. **Pressure from other people (other Christians)** – These people produce more heaviness of soul than God does or ever would. When we are kicked down, people tend to flaunt their endless string of victories in our presence. We stare at a pointed finger more often than at an open hand. **Someone has said that “God’s army is the only army that shoots it wounded!”** What in your opinion does that mean? *Romans 14:1, “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.” Romans 15:1ff, “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: ‘The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.’”*
2. **Pressure from our own self-imposed guilt** - Our conscience is armed and ready to fire when any semblance of humanity creep in. It’s part of the “superstar syndrome” which touches most of us. We’ve been programmed with it. We forget that God saw us as being so needy and imperfect that He came to save us. We should not be surprised that failure occurs – and will continue to do so. Our human, fallen nature is with us from the cradle to the grave. Apart from God’s nature given us by His Holy Spirit, there is no hope for encouragement or success.

One Major Problem: Too often our failure is the result of a preoccupation with unrealistic standards and dreams far beyond any human reach - In other words, our refusal to admit that we sometime fail and fail hard. Our lack of honesty about ourselves... sometimes we just think more highly of our selves than we ought, like I never make mistakes, I never fail, I never fall. “I’m just a pretty good old joe!” It’s not uncommon for only one of several failures to plummet our outlook. Failure sets in like paralysis.

II. PREVAILING ATTITUDE ABOUT FAILURE

Presently the bookstores are full of popular “How to Succeed Manuals” on every conceivable subject. And why is that? Because we are so concerned with the glory of God? I would hope so, but there are also other reasons. Too often, it is because we look at failure with eyes of scorn. We view failure as a Waterloo. We see it as the plague of plagues and as the worst thing that could happen to us. As a result, the fear of failure has many people in neutral or paralyzed or playing the game of cover up.

3 Ways Failure May Play Out in Our Lives:

1. **The sin cover-up** - We consciously or subconsciously ignore our sins and failures because to admit them is to admit failure and that’s a plague worse than death.

2. **The fear factor** - People often refuse to tackle a job or take on a responsibility, or move forward in life for fear of failure.
3. **The insecurity syndrome** - People believe if they fail they are no good. They think failure means you are a bad person and *you are a failure*.

There are Scriptural examples of failure, and not from the Biblical characters you would expect. We know of the failure of Adam and Eve, or Sampson, or even a Judas in the New Testament, but what about those we expect not to fail... the faith heroes, the standouts. What about their failure. Amazingly, through the transparency and honesty of Scripture we get to see that most of the great leaders in Scripture at some time in their careers experienced some sort of failure. For instance:

4 Biblical Examples of Failure: *(Not a exhaustive list of all the human failure communicated in the Bible)*

1. **Abraham** - When Abraham should have stayed in the land and trusted the Lord, he fled to Egypt because of the drought. And this was by no means the last of Abraham's failures.
2. **Moses** - Moses, in trying to help his people, ran ahead of the Lord and killed the Egyptian. Later, against the command of God, he struck the rock in his anger.
3. **David** - When David should have been out in the field of battle, he stayed home and committed adultery with Bathsheba and then plotted the murder of her husband.
4. **Peter** - Peter, in spite of his self-confidence and his great boast, denied the Lord, as did the rest of the disciples who fled before the evening of our Lord's arrest was over.

Fundamental Principle: Sometimes God must engineer failure in us before He can bring about success with us. Our failures are often rungs on the ladder of growth - if we will learn from our mistakes rather than grovel in the dirt.

What This Doesn't Mean:

1. **Failure should not be an excuse for sin** - This is not to make excuses for sin or to place a premium on mistakes or failure. We often hear this idea communicated in a statement like this; "Well, I can't help it, I'm only human and God made me this way!" or how about this one, "Well we all fail and make mistakes!" **What is this statement really communicating? Are these true statements? What is the problem with these statements?**
2. **Failure should not be viewed as a necessary precursor for success** - This does not mean that a person must fail before they can be a success, but our failures and the trial they may incur, whether in the form of rebellion or just foolish blunders, can become tools of learning and stepping stones to success.

The point is, we should never allow our fear of failure to paralyze us from tackling a job or trying something that challenges our comfort zone. Nor should we allow past failures to keep us down or keep us from recovering and moving on in the service of the Savior. This means we should never allow failure to make us think we are a failure or that we can never change or that we can never again count for the Lord or that God can't do anything with us

because we have failed in some way. The Bible says we are all sinners and prone to failure, but in Christ we can become overcomers.

6 Mature Attitudes About Failure and Success:

1. **Mature believers understand that a Christian can become successful in spite of failure because of God's incredible grace and forgiveness** - We may have to live with the results of some of our failures or sins, yet God is free to continue to love us in Christ and use us for His purposes because of grace (*See John 21:15-19, Jesus' Reinstatement of Peter*).
2. **The mature believer seeks to use failures as lessons for growth and change** - Mature believers will act on two principles:

2 Principles to Remember:

- (1) **They understand that failures remind us of the consequences of our decisions** - We reap what we sow. This is the law of harvest. Failures remind us of what can happen, they can make us careful, but they should not be allowed to paralyze us.
- (2) **The mature believer recognizes that our failures show us what we should and should not do** - They become lessons in where we went wrong and why. You know what they say, "hindsight is 10/20." It can help us avoid the same mistake twice if we will learn from history. In other words, we ought to learn from our mistakes.

GREAT FAILURE TO SUCCESS STORY: THOMAS EDISON

Thomas Edison invented the microphone, the phonograph, the incandescent light, the storage battery, talking movies, and more than 1000 other things. December 1914 he had worked for 10 years on a storage battery. This had greatly strained his finances. This particular evening spontaneous combustion had broken out in the film room. Within minutes all the packing compounds, celluloid for records and film, and other flammable goods were in flames. Fire companies from eight surrounding towns arrived, but the heat was so intense and the water pressure so low that the attempt to douse the flames was futile. Everything was destroyed. Edison was 67. With all his assets going up in a whoosh (although the damage exceeded two million dollars, the buildings were only insured for \$238,000 because they were made of concrete and thought to be fireproof), would his spirit be broken? The inventor's 24-year old son, Charles, searched frantically for his father. He finally found him, calmly watching the fire, his face glowing in the reflection, his white hair blowing in the wind. "My heart ached for him," said Charles. "He was 67—no longer a young man—and everything was going up in flames. When he saw me, he shouted, 'Charles, where's your mother?' When I told him I didn't know, he said, 'Find her. Bring her here. She will never see anything like this as long as she lives.'" The next morning, Edison looked at the ruins and said, "There is great value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Thank God we can start anew." Three weeks after the fire, Edison managed to deliver the first phonograph.

3. When mature believers fail they do these four things -

4 Things Mature Believers Do When They Fail:

- (1) **Acknowledge their failures and refuse to hide behind excuses -**
- (2) **Confess any sin to God when sin is involved in the failure -**
- (3) **Study or examine what happened so they can learn from the failure -**
- (4) **Put it behind them and move ahead** – As the Apostle Paul said in **Philippians 3:13**, *“¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead.”* Being assured of God’s forgiveness, we are to put our failures behind us, count on and rest in His forgiveness, and refuse to use them as an excuse for morbid introspection, pessimism, self pity, depression, and fear of moving on for the Lord.

4. Mature believers grow through failure by knowing and acting on certain truths:

3 Truths to Remember When You Fail:

- (1) **We are accepted in the Lord on the basis of grace (God freely given and unmerited favor), not our performance -**
- (2) **We are human and, as a result, we are not now perfect nor will we ever be** – No matter what anyone claims, we will never experience sinless perfect either in our own life or the life of anyone else on this side of heaven.
- (3) **God still has a plan for our lives, He is not through with us yet, and we need to get on with His plan** – Once again the Apostle Paul said it like this in **Philippians 1:6**, *“⁶ being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;”*

5. The mature believer will understand that there are different kinds of failure –

3 Different Kinds of Failure:

- (1) **There are those who have genuinely failed according to the principles of Scripture** - If we fail to know why we believe what we believe and then fail to give an adequate reason to those who ask for a reason for our hope ([1 Pet. 3:15](#)), then we have failed in our responsibility to witness. That can become a stepping stone to getting equipped and to becoming bold in our witness, but at that point there was failure.
- (2) **There is a false guilt of failure because of a wrong view of success** - Many missionaries have labored faithfully in foreign countries without much success by way of converts, but that by no means indicates they are failures. A biblical illustration is Isaiah. Right from the beginning, after seeing the Lord high and lifted up, after confessing his own sin and that of his nation, and after saying, “Here am I, send me,” God sent him to preach to a people who would not listen and told him so beforehand (see Isa. 6:8-10). In the eyes of people, he was a failure, but not in God’s eyes.
- (3) **There is another class of failure; those who mistakenly believe they are okay and never fail** – There are those within the church, who think they are okay, saved and heaven bound. They do all the right “churchy” things, and know how to answer all

the question when asked about faith. They are good morally, and their very “religious.” Yet they do not realize that from God’s perspective they are failures because they have never truly been saved. One man put it this way: “I climbed the ladder of success only to discover that my ladder was leaning against the wrong wall!” That is ultimate failure... if you don’t know Jesus.

6. **The mature believer is one who understands the importance of choosing the right standard of measurement to determine success and failure** - There are a number common worldly beliefs about success that people apply to themselves and others, but they are all distortions of the truth.

III. PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO FOLLOW FAILURE

Psalm 103 gives encouraging counsel to those who have failed... or think they have failed. David’s wise words can have an effect upon five aspects of our lives – responsibility, focus, security, perspective, and morale. Let’s consider the suggestions related to each of these.

1. **Responsibility... your reaction to your responsibility (vv.1-2)** – Speaking first to himself, David writes, *“Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.”* Upon failure, the human tendency is to scapegoat blame. However, usually no one (whether mate, boss, friend, parent, or child) is to blame for what happens. Different ones are often merely the catalyst that bring failure to a head, while we’re left on our own to sift through our reactions – bitterness... moodiness... anger... unhappiness... lack of forgiveness. **A sobering truth:** One’s mindset is his soul’s expression. The first person one should respond to in time of failure is himself... working at getting himself together.
2. **Focus... replace blaming with claiming God’s grace (vv.2-5)** – Not easy counsel. To counteract blaming, David writes, *“... forget not all his benefits...” (v.2)*. In verses 3-5 he lists benefits to be remembered: pardon from iniquity, healing of all diseases, redemption from the pit, crowning with lovingkindness and compassion, and satisfaction with good things. But note the reason, *“... so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (v.5)*. David’s point is that no one is exempt from the responsibility of giving grace to another because of the way he himself has been dealt with by God. Not his reminder (I love this!), *“He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions (failures) from us.” (vv.10-12)*. Learning to do to others what God has done to us is a lifelong project. Blaming is never acceptable; showing grace (the grace we ourselves have received) always is acceptable.
3. **Security... count on the Lord’s constant understanding and complete forgiveness (vv.13-14)** – We look to God for these, not to people. *“As a father has compassion on his Children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed (“He is mindful that we are but dust”).* In spite of what He sees, still... He has endless compassion. What a basis for personal security!
4. **Perspective... refuse to compare yourself with any other person (vv.15-18)** – What applies to one, applies to all, *“As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more” (vv.15-16)*. Grass is grass, wherever it grows. Grass and flowers quickly die

and decay. Apart from God's lovingkindness, man's life is no different from field grass. When one can view his peers in light of this insight, he finds there is no logical reason for him to evaluate his worth or success by that of another. Comparison is self-inflicted grief which is needless and destructive.

5. **Morale... continue to obey the Lord (vv.19-22)** – Compromise weakens one's inner strength of character, and morale slides. As deterioration occurs, we grasp for human alternatives to hold our courage and confidence together and to keep our strength artificially propped up. However, no lasting courage can form apart from living in the mainstream of godly action and behavior. David, addressing his thoughts toward the angels, associates "*mighty ones...*" (v.20) with obedience... "*who do his will*" (v.21). In the aftermath of apparent failure, we must stay with it – doing what God wishes us to do, "*obey his word*" (v.20). What may appear to be defeat in the eyes of the human observer, may in actuality turn out to be great success in the eyes of God.

IV. SUCCINCT LESSONS TO AFFECT TOMORROW

1. **Failure is not the end** – Psalm 37:23-24, "*If the Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumbles (fails), he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.*"
2. **Even good people fail sometimes** – Psalm 34:19, "*A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all.*" TLB "The good man does not escape all troubles, he has them too. But the Lord helps him in each and every one."
3. **Failure is not final, you can succeed next time** – Philippians 4:13, "*I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*"
4. **Don't let failing and failure discourage you** – Joshua 1:9, "*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.*"

GREAT DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT ON FAILURE

The disciples went to sleep when they should have kept awake, and when they realized what they had done it produced despair in them. When we feel something is beyond repair it can cause us to despair, and we say, "*It's all over now, there's no use trying anymore.*" If we think that this kind of despair is rare, we're mistaken, it's a very common human experience. Whenever we realize that we've missed out on a magnificent opportunity Jesus Christ comes and says, "*That opportunity is lost forever, you cannot alter it, but arise and go to the next thing.*" Let the past sleep, but let it sleep on the bosom of Christ, and go out into the future with Him. There are experiences like this in each of our lives. We find ourselves in despair and we cannot lift ourselves out of it. The disciples in this instance had done a downright unforgivable thing — they had gone to sleep instead of watching with Jesus, but He said to them "*Arise and do the next thing.*" If we're Christians, what is the next thing? It's to trust Him absolutely and to pray on the ground of His Redemption. Never let the sense of failure keep you from moving forward with Christ.

- Oswald Chambers

