

Call to Obedience #157
 PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA
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Do not quit; do not sulk; do not take downtime.
 Do not go into introspection; do not resent
 Chastisement or demotion - GO RIGHT ON!

COPING WITH FAILURE

By Pastor Reimar A. C. Schultze

“And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.”—Numbers 20:10-12

The best way to deal with failure is to not have any. Failure has enduring repercussions. It is the breeding ground for negative consequences and guilt feelings. **It is, therefore, wise for all of us to do everything we can to not fail because the energy required for success is always less than the energy required to clean up after failure.** Take heed to the words of Solomon, *“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life”* (Pr. 4:23). Capture every moment for Jesus. *“So then, brace up and reinvigorate and set right your slackened and weakened and drooping hands, and strengthen your feeble and palsied and tottering knees, And cut through and make firm and plain and smooth, straight paths for your feet—(yes, make them) safe and upright and happy paths that go in the right direction—so that the lame and halting (limbs) may not be put out of joint, but rather may be cured”* (He. 12:12,13 Amp.). Yet, we must face the fact that sometime we are likely to meet with failure. Whether it is caused by our own neglect or that of others doesn't matter. The issue is where do we go after failure?

Moses had experienced 39 years of faithfulness to God, a marvelous record, considering he lived his life surrounded by hundreds of thousands of perpetual murmurers. This gives credibility to what God can do with us and for us if we yield ourselves entirely to him. He is, indeed, well able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before God (Jude 24). Moses lived a spotless life in a negative environment without having experienced the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. How much more can the Lord expect of us with Christ dwelling in us? Yet, after 39 years of obedience, in a moment of weakness Moses overstepped his territory: he struck the rock when he should have spoken to it. Moses failed, and God let him know it. God allowed this holy man to suffer the consequences of his failure. God said to him and Aaron, *“therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them”* (Nu. 20:12). Let us learn from this that **forgiveness does not absolve us from consequences.** The forgiveness of God means that God will not hold our sin against us on the Day of Judgment. At repentance, He will remove our sin as far as the east is from the west. Moses was forgiven, but he still had to pay for his sin in the “here and now.”

My friend, we take sin too lightly. We must know that sinning does not build credit with God, but rather it causes us to lose credit with him. It is good to have the fear of God in our hearts, lest we sin. When we confess our sins and repent of them, there is no eternal judgment on them, but a temporary judgment may follow. The Apostle Paul called it a chastisement (He. 12:6-11). God told Moses *“therefore thou shalt not...”* So, we never gain by sinning. We always lose when we choose the path of disobedience. Chastisement is designed to break us and refine us. It is born out of God's love to make us more like him. It is not pleasant, but, in time, it will bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness (v.10). It is evident, then, that there is a temporary punishment—a chastisement—attached to the natural consequences of disobedience.

Take the case of a boy who gets into the cookie jar five times a year. Each time he repents with all his heart, and each time, his father forgives him with all his heart. But, after the third or fifth time, the father decides to keep the cookie jar empty. No more cookies! That's a natural consequence of the sin committed five times in succession. The spiritual consequence is that, although the father's love is just the same, his trust level has gone down. Yes, indeed, God will continue to forgive if we continue to repent. But how much can God trust a man who keeps eating of the forbidden fruit from time to time? How much can he trust that man with souls, revelations or assignments?

God trusted Moses with a nation to lead out of Egypt and into Canaan. But because he sinned, even though provoked, God no longer trusted Moses or permitted him to lead Israel into Canaan. Because Moses sinned, God said, *"therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them."* Make no mistake about it, once we sin, everything is different. God's love will be the same, but we damage his trust toward us each time we disobey. Generally, there is a *"therefore ye shall not..."* with every sin we commit.

Oh, what King David would have been spared if he had followed custom and been at war that day (2 S. 11:1, 2). He wouldn't have seen Bathsheba bathing. Or, what if he had been enjoying that sweet hour of prayer that morning? He would not have seen Bathsheba. His neglect led to adultery, death, murder, rebellion and division all his life. Yes, there is a *"therefore ye shall not..."* associated with disobedience. Can you see that what I said earlier is worth repeating? **It takes, by far, less energy to avoid sin than to deal with the consequences of our sin later.** It takes, by far, less energy to have that sweet hour of prayer each day than to suffer the consequences of not having it.

So then, Moses was forgiven, but with a *"therefore thou shalt not..."* judgment attached to his name! How did he deal with it? Well, he set the example for the way we should all deal with failure. First, Moses knew that, having been forgiven, he was still God's servant and that God was still God. God's character never changes. He was known to Moses as *"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..."* (Ex. 34:6, 7). Moses knew that he was not fired, just demoted. Since his heart was the meekest heart on the face of the earth, he could handle that. King Saul could not. His life ended in suicide. What a wonderful man Moses was. For him, stepping down was not any harder than stepping up. He felt more at home being a servant than being a master. The leadership desire was burned out of his heart 40 years before in the desert. A meek, lowly, and broken heart is adaptable. It is as happy to be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord as to be a king—as happy to sweep floors as to stand in the pulpit. Moses knew that if he could not enter the land, he still could see the Savior. He knew that if he could not lead his people into the land, he could lead them up to it and then appoint someone to take over. Because of the meekness of his heart, Moses could settle for less and still maintain the victory. Oh, my friend, can you settle for less and be happy? Can you settle for less and still be grateful for the Savior and heaven; or does failure, demotion, or chastisement drive you out of the camp?

Further notice that **Moses' vision was not on himself, but on getting God's people into Canaan.** He had some of Queen Esther's attitude of *"If I perish, I perish"* but let the nation be saved. Failure turned Saul's attention on himself, because that is where it was before. But for Moses, the attention was always on the command, "Take them to Canaan." A personal failure should not be an excuse to abandon the mission if it could be helped! Oh, what a glorious transition from Numbers 20:13 of *"therefore ye shall not..."* to verse 14, *"And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom..."* He is not lying on the ground in self-pity as in Joshua's case at Ai. He is not tearing his robes or putting on sackcloth. God's *"therefore ye shall not..."* is followed by *"Moses sent messengers..."* There is no downtime for the machinery of God!

Do your failures require downtime like Joshua at Ai or Elijah at the juniper tree? Do your failures cause the Lord's army to halt, waver or stumble? Do your failures send out ripples of discouragement to the body of Christ? Do you require saints to leave the battle lines to minister to

you? Or are you like Moses, who, having received the sentence of judgment for a failure, goes right on with the divine mission? Is a mission any less worth pursuing after failure than before? Is a mission less demanding of your energy after your failure than before? Oh, my friend, do not allow failure to take you from the oars, the captain's wheel or the setting of the sails. The journey must go on uninterrupted. If you keep your hands available for God, he will continue to use them!

Joshua went down at Ai, and Elijah went down at a juniper tree. These failures caused them to break step with God. Moses never went down—he went right on. Moses went on because he had never been taught to go by how he felt but by what needed to be done. We Americans are masters of introspection. This ingrained habit has led to an epidemic of spiritual neurosis in the American church. The most dominant question Christians ask of each other over and over again is, “How are you feeling?” Strangers from foreign shores who come to this country are utterly at a loss at this question. I for one, while in my native land, was never asked this question but by a medical doctor. How we feel is inconsequential to the need, to the battle to be fought, to our Canaan to be conquered! The question, whenever asked and explored, will almost always lead to downtime. It will take our eyes off Jesus and his work. Introspection is not God's psychoanalysis or soul therapy. No! Introspection usually makes a failure greater. It turns a pimple into a sore, a cold into pneumonia, an infection into gangrene, and a stumble into a fall. Because of introspection after failure, Joshua lost sight of his mission, and Elijah lost sight of his God. “*I am no better than my fathers*” was Elijah's conclusion after introspection. First of all, Elijah: that is up to God to decide; and secondly, Elijah: what does it really matter how you compare to others if there is a work to be done?

Both Joshua and Elijah had downtime. **Don't think about HOW YOU FEEL, but think about YOUR GOD-GIVEN RESPONSIBILITIES.** Those who continually think about how they feel have the greatest absentee record in church attendance. They fail in daily prayer, witnessing, helping others and reading Scripture. Others feel just as miserable, depressed, hurt and crushed at times, yet, they refuse to think about how they feel because they are too busy thinking “What is it, Lord, that you would have me do?” they continue in mission and overcome their inner struggles through a life of obedience. Generally speaking, people who serve down-time because of feelings do not need sympathy and counseling as much as a new command, such as “*Get thee up*” (Jos. 7:10) or “*Arise, and eat*” (1 K. 19:7). Isn't it marvelous that because Moses never went down, God never had to tell Moses to get up? May you, too, never break step with God over a failure.

It is not our failures we need to count, but our blessings. It is not our shortcomings we must review, but God's promises. It is not feelings we need to explore, but responsibilities. So, when failures come, don't quit; sulk, or take time out. Don't go into introspection, and resent demotion, but go right on with God, finish whatever work He has for you to do. That's what Moses did. Oh, what a marvelous man he was: great in success and greater yet in failure. No wonder God talked to him face to face. Because of his brilliant, instant recovery from failure, GOD CONTINUED TO LEAD HIM AS HE LED HIM BEFORE THE FAILURE. God continued to hear his prayers as before. Moses went on preparing Israel for entrance into the Promised Land. God led him victoriously in several battles. He continued to teach God's people. He continued to inspire courage, faith and discipline, ALL because when he failed, HE DID NOT TAKE TIME OUT. I am convinced that his appearance at the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus (Ma. 17:3) had not only to do with his holiness of life but with his spiritual recovery from failure. Moses, in my mind, remains one of the brightest beacons in human history. He taught us all how to succeed and how to recover from failure in style. We need to know both.

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