

Don't Be Afraid To Fail

Believers tend to see failure as a sign of spiritual deficiency. But God can use it to teach us and strengthen our faith.

Have you ever failed at anything in your life? Do you know anyone who has?

If you've been around long enough, the answer to both questions is a resounding "yes!" That means you know how difficult it can be to bounce back from a failure, especially if you are a Christian. Believers seem to think that spiritual people will always do the right thing, and that a misstep or failure is a sign that our spirituality is deficient.

Yet with faith, it is possible to be even stronger after a failure. Numerous biblical figures, including Peter, Moses, David and Abraham demonstrated this truth.

When I conduct seminars on this topic, I lead people through the following logic:

Question: Is failure a learning experience? **Answer:** Yes.

Question: Can we often learn more from failure than from success? **Answer:** Yes.

Question: Are we always to be learning and growing? **Answer:** Yes.

I consider the most significant redemptive failure in the Bible to be Samson. Samson is mentioned as a hero of the faith in Hebrews 11, right along with Moses and Abraham. "And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson," the writer of Hebrews tells us (v. 32, NKJV).

When Samson's name is mentioned, there is no asterisk or

footnote pointing out what a colossal failure he was. In fact, it was his faith during a time of failure that earned him this honorable mention.

Let's look at three lessons we can learn from Samson's life. If you don't know his story, take time now to read about him in Judges 13:1-16:31.

1. God is often leading you, even though you may not know it.

The Bible tells us regarding Samson: "Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. So he went up and told his father and mother, saying, 'I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife.' Then his father and mother said to him, 'Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?'

"And Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me, for she pleases me well.' But his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord—that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel" (Judg. 14:1-4).

Notice that Samson's parents did not realize his request for a wife from among the Philistines was prompted by God. In a similar way, God is working in your life to fulfill your purpose whether you realize it or not. It doesn't matter what you can see or understand. Faith requires that you believe God is at work in your life, even in the failures and hardship.

Once I was driving someplace and got lost. The delay made me late for an important meeting. I was so distressed that I was not on time—punctuality is one of my highest values. Yet several years later I encountered a situation in which I was able to use the same roads I was on when I was lost to get to another place I needed to go. God was using my failure to

prepare me for future success.

I know this example doesn't seem significant in view of the much bigger issues we face in life, but doesn't the end result hold true for more crucial failures, such as relational breakdowns or business losses, as well? God uses our failures, which can be monumental at the time, to prepare us for some future success.

In Samson's case, his family didn't understand what was going on, and neither did Samson. God was leading him, however—positioning him right where God wanted him to be so he could do what the Lord wanted him to do.

It may not seem as if God is leading you, but He is. When you feel as if He isn't there, trust Him more, not less. Put your hope in the God of your purpose and move on. Have faith in God, even in the midst of a seeming failure.

2. Don't ignore or run from your past; face it.

Samson's story continues: "So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah. Now to his surprise, a young lion came roaring against him. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.

"Then he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. And behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the carcass of the lion. He took some of it in his hands and went along, eating. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them, and they also ate. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion" (Judg. 14:5-9).

I would argue that your most significant and life-giving

testimonies are not the great successes you've had but your greatest failures and the way in which God helped you recover from them. Like Samson, you may have wrestled some lions such as loneliness, bankruptcy, broken relationships and unemployment. Even if you are young, you undoubtedly have testimonies of defeating, through the power of God, lions that came to destroy you.

When Samson returned to the lion he had torn apart with his bare hands, it brought forth something sweet that fed both him and his parents, even though it was dead. What is in your past that you thought was dead? Is it a failure, or something you enjoyed doing but no longer do? Or is it a significant victory that you don't talk about anymore?

Perhaps it's time to revisit that and see if there is something sweet in it. In faith, go back over the lessons you learned during a time of failure and see if they can help you or someone else today. Use those lessons to write a book or screenplay, counsel others or simply encourage yourself as you face today's trials. When you faithfully recount your victories in the midst of failures, God will help you bring forth something sweet.

3. When you fail, run to God—not from Him.

If you are familiar with Samson's story, you will recall that after falling in love with the Philistine woman, Samson unwittingly gave her the secret to his strength—his uncut hair. The Philistines used this knowledge to take his strength away, and he ended up shaved, blind and in prison. But while he was incarcerated, God prepared him for his ultimate victory, described in the passage below.

“So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, ‘Call for Samson, that he may perform for us.’ So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars. Then Samson said to

the lad who held him by the hand, 'Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them.'

"Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there—about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed. Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, 'O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!'

"And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. Then Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life" (Judg. 16:25-30).

Earlier in this chapter we find a significant verse: "However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven" (Judg. 16:22). Even though Samson failed, the source of his strength (his hair) began to return when he focused again on fulfilling God's purpose for his life.

At this point in the story, however, Samson was a miserable failure, or so it seemed. He was defeated, blinded and forced to entertain his enemies. Yet Samson prayed and God heard him, and he literally brought the house down at his last performance.

You have to admire Samson's faith. If failure disqualifies someone, then why was he praying? What right did he have to ask God for another chance? And why did God hear his prayer? God didn't seem to mind that Samson was a faithful failure.

We too must overcome our tendency to run from God when we fail. We inherited that trait from Adam and Eve, who hid from God in the garden after they disobeyed Him (see Gen. 3:8). In faith, we must overcome the tendency of running from God and

substitute it with a habit of running to God. The Scriptures assure us that we can approach God boldly, just as Samson did, even when we fail.

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15-16).

What lessons can you learn from Samson’s failures? How can you apply them to your current situation? Is it time to trust God even though it seems as if nothing is happening in your life? Is it time to re-evaluate your past through the eyes of faith and see if there is a failure-turned-victory that can yield something useful for Him and others?

Take time to write out your answers on a piece of paper or in your journal. Put down your thoughts as you study Samson’s life. Then look at the lessons from other faithful failures such as Moses, David and Peter. Use their profiles to map out a faith path to recovery, turning your failures into wonderful learning lessons for you and others.

If Samson made it, so can you, but only if you don’t allow your failures to derail you. Having faith in God will keep you on the right path and will help make you into a “faith-full” failure, as Samson was.

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