

How God Deals With Your Failure

A testimony from the Azusa Street revival in 1906 told of a missionary being attacked by the enemy with the suggestion she was forsaken by God and had committed the unpardonable sin. "God hates you—drown yourself," he repeatedly urged. She almost did.

She returned to her room from the river, threw herself down, fell asleep and dreamed. She seemed to be in a boat on which all the people but herself were rejoicing and praising God. She heard the captain call out to the pilot, "Sound the depths and compare it with the love of God." The depths were sounded, and the call came back, "No bottom. No bottom."

She awoke in an ocean of God's love, all darkness past and the cry ringing in her ears, "No bottom."

That's the spirit of Psalm 106 which, like Psalm 105, reviews God's acts on behalf of Israel—except this psalm does not skip over the record of human failures.

Their History, My History

Too often church folk fail to be honest about their own faults.

Not so this psalmist. In advance of describing Israel's long and deep plunge into disobedience and rebellion, he places himself in their company by saying, "We have sinned with our fathers" (Ps. 106:6). That's why he can begin the psalm by praising the Lord not because he is good, but that God is good (v. 1). The heart of a God-seeking person desires to do right (vv. 2-3) but honestly admits personal failure and the need for God's help (vv. 4-5).

With whom do you identify? Those religious types who act like they've never done anything wrong; or the humble, vulnerable, poor and sinful, who say, "I have done wrong. Please, Lord, help me."

Falling Away From God

The bulk of this psalm is an album detailing one photo after another in Israel's descent away from the one who called, delivered, sustained and loved them.

Snapshot 1: Failure in Egypt (vv. 7-12). When Israel found themselves at the cul-de-sac of the Red Sea, they had already forgotten the miracle of the 10 plagues. They failed to connect God's past help with their present need.

Are you, like them, resentful and rebellious that God permitted a Red Sea in your life?

God keeps helping you anyway—just as He did with Israel. He leads through depths (v. 11) and deserts (v. 14). You feared the waves would drown you, but your enemies perished instead. Can you give God a hand for that (v. 12)?

Snapshots 2-7: Failures in the wilderness (vv. 13-33). One problem in wilderness living is the sameness of the daily diet—you resent the monotony of the routine and crave something more fulfilling. Israel hated its plain morning/evening menu of manna and wanted more tasty food. God sometimes gives you what you want, and to your surprise, it makes you sick (vv. 13-15).

Another problem in wilderness living is the temptation to mutiny when things aren't going your way by listening to people who tell you what you want to hear rather than what is right (vv. 15-18). Don't resent spiritual authority in your life: the authority of Jesus, of the Bible, of godly counsel.

Impatience is also a problem in the wilderness. Israel stopped

still for 40 days while their leader Moses disappeared up on a mountain. Don't you hate doing nothing but waiting? Will you also make your own god, your own solution (vv. 19-23)?

Next comes unbelief with its horrendous consequences. When you are tempted for the umpteenth time to lash out at God, why not instead hand over to Him your bad attitude and ask Him to give you a right heart about His purposes for you in the wilderness (vv. 24-27)?

Resist the Lord over long periods of time and the unthinkable can happen: moral disintegration. Numbers 25 spells out the full story summarized in vv. 28–31 of Psalm 106: seduction, flagrant immorality and idolatry. You are capable of more evil than you think. Will you draw personal and public lines of loyalty as did Phinehas?

Finally, the perpetual ever-present wilderness test is to mistrust God, to suppose He's abandoned you in the desert of life and will provide no resource to sustain you (vv. 32-33). Are you grouching with the untruth that God doesn't care about you?

Snapshot 8: Failure in the land of promise (vv. 34-39). Centuries of living in Canaan, summarized in these verses, show God's people going from bad to worse—becoming so vile that the holy land was stained with the blood of their children whom they sacrificed to idols. How can anyone get so far from God? It begins with disobedience (v. 34) and ends with not a shred of difference between you and the worst pagans.

Snapshot 9: Disinheritance (vv. 40-43). God wanted His people to be fulfilled. They chose instead to reject His love. When you do that, here's what happens: You fall away from freedom into bondage and oppression, and "waste away in [your] sin."

God's Great and Marvelous Grace

After such a record of failure, does God wipe His hands clean of His people? Not so. He heard their first cry in Egypt centuries earlier (Ex. 3:7) and their most recent (Ps. 106:44).

He hears yours also. You have not yet exhausted His grace—but don't try to find the bottom.

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