

Shake Yourself Loose From Condemnation

We tend to boast in the power of faith while minimizing the value of hope. Yet, “faith is the substance of things hoped for” (Heb. 11:1). Without first having a living hope in God, our faith is meaningless. Indeed, the first stage of transformation is the awakening of hope.

Yet, even after we come to Christ, we still fail. Often a downward spiral occurs when sin opens the door to condemnation, and condemnation smothers the voice of hope. Consider the story of Israel’s conquest of Canaan. The Lord was about to prosper Israel with the wealth of the Canaanites, but only if the spoils of their first battle at Jericho were completely dedicated to God.

However, one man, Achan, defied the Lord’s edict. He took silver, gold and a garment from Shinar, and then he hid the spoils in his tent. As a result of his sin, 36 Israelites died in their next battle—defeated and humiliated by the tiny city of Ai.

After the Lord exposed Achan as the perpetrator, Joshua took him, along with his family and possessions, and brought them all to a valley. There Israel’s leader said, “‘Why have you troubled us? The Lord will trouble you this day.’ And all Israel stoned them with stones ... Therefore the name of that place has been called the valley of Achor to this day” (Joshua 7:25-26).

The word *Achor* meant “troubling.” It represented the trouble and pain one person’s sin exacted on many others. Certainly the most terrible thing Achan experienced was that his sin caused his wife and children to die with him. As they huddled together awaiting this horrible judgment, the guilt and regret

flooding Achan's mind must have been insufferable.

Personal Failure

In time, the valley of Achor came to symbolize the worst of punishments. It was a place of death and desolation. Today, of course, we do not stone those whose sin or irresponsibility has caused others grief. Still, sin has consequences, and though we may not be physically stoned for our failure, the effects of public condemnation can be just as crushing to the human spirit. The fact is, too many of us have known a personal valley of Achor where our moral negligence or ill-advised actions caused another's suffering.

Perhaps you committed adultery, and your spouse and children are devastated. It might be that your anxious or careless driving caused an accident, resulting in great suffering or possibly even another person's death. Or maybe your lack of Christian example has caused your children to turn from God. The possible ways of falling are endless, but the result is nearly always the same: It is as though a curse rests on your life.

Not only does your own heart condemn you, but there are also others who know your failure, whose chorus of criticisms convince you of your hopeless nature. Public censure, cold looks and judgmental attitudes have the same effect on your soul as Achan's stoning had on his flesh, only what dies in you is hope. Where once you could look with anticipation toward the future, now heartache and regret block your view.

Only virtue, made pure and strong by true repentance, can displace the burden of self-condemnation. Thus, the only correct response to wrong actions and their consequences is the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, the enemy has many Christians trapped in unbelief and self-condemnation. They know what they did was wrong and they hate it, but they cannot unburden themselves of

the guilt.

Remember, our Redeemer came to proclaim liberty to those who are “prisoners” (see Isaiah 61:1). Is He speaking only of those who are incarcerated in jails? No, His mission is for all of us who are prisoners of our past failures. God wants us to learn from our mistakes, not be held captive to them. Jesus came to deliver and restore those whose dreams lie buried in the valley of Achor.

Personal Tragedy

The burdens we carry may have nothing to do with moral failure. They might have come from any number of life’s calamities.

One of the worst ordeals for the soul is the death of a loved one. Such a loss can leave us excessively burdened and trapped in the past. The story of Abraham’s father, Terah, gives us an insightful picture of a man who could not depart from the loss of a loved one.

Terah had three sons: Abram, Nahor and Haran. The Bible tells us, “Haran died in the presence of his father” (Gen. 11:28, NASB). To lose your son can produce terrible heartache; to have him die in your arms can be utterly devastating.

In time, Terah took his family and left Ur of the Chaldeans in search of a new destiny in Canaan. En route, however, Terah had to pass through a city with the same name as his deceased son, Haran. Instead of continuing on to Canaan, the Scripture says Terah “went as far as Haran, and settled there” (v. 31).

Longing for a deceased loved one is normal. However, life’s tragedies also have a way of obligating us to a false loyalty that prohibits the release of our pain. Without notice, a face in an airport or a song on the radio floods our hearts, and suddenly we are overcome by sorrow. How quickly we reenter the place of our grief; how easy it is to settle there!

“And Terah died in Haran” (v. 32). Not only did Terah settle in Haran, but he also died there. The wording is both prophetic and significant. Perhaps it was a false sense of guilt that held him hostage: *If only I had done such and such my son would not have died!* Whatever the reason, Terah was never able to live beyond Haran’s death.

We must also see that, as painful as the loss of a loved one is, we cannot permit the wounds of our past to nullify what God has for us in our future. Even if we enter limping, we must not settle for something outside our destiny. God’s grace is here now. With His help, we must choose to journey on to Canaan or we too will die in Haran.

A Time For Healing

These two things, personal failure and personal tragedy, can place cruel burdens of oppression and guilt upon our souls. God’s response to our need is that, in addition to forgiving our sins, He has laid on Christ “the guilt of us all” (Isaiah 53:6 NAB). Whether our guilt is justified or not, it must be lifted from our shoulders and placed on Christ.

Today a renewal is occurring in various parts of the world; God is restoring joy to His people. Many whom the Lord has touched were weighed down—just like you might be—with either moral failure or tragedy. In the very place where our deferred hopes produced heart sickness, Christ is here “to bind up the brokenhearted” (Isaiah 61:1. NASB). Where once sorrow and heaviness reigned, He gives a “garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting” (v. 3).

No longer will church attendance be a penance for your failures. From now on you shall enter His gates with thanksgiving. Indeed, to every Christian struggling with an unbearable burden, the Lord says,
You are still My bride.”

Indeed, speaking of this very valley of troubling, the Lord has promised: "I will allure her, bring her into the wilderness and speak kindly to her. Then I will give her her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor as a door of hope. And she will sing there as in the days of her youth" (Hosea 2:14-15).

The fruitfulness of God's blessing from this day forward shall increase in your life. And there in "the valley of Achor"—the scene of your deepest wounds or worst failures—the Lord has placed for you a "door of hope." His goal is nothing less than to restore to you the song of the Lord, that you might sing again "as in the days of [your] youth."

The preceding message is adapted from a chapter in Francis Frangipane's book, The Days of His Presence.

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