

“FACING THE GIANT OF FAILURE”

by Rom A. Pegram (6/16/19)

The next time you think yourself a failure ... and don't think that God can use YOU, remember this (from God's word):

- Noah was a drunk...
- Jacob was a liar...
- Moses had a stuttering problem...
- Gideon was afraid...
- Samson was a womanizer...
- David was an adulterer & a murderer...
- Jonah ran from God...
- Job went bankrupt...
- Peter denied Christ...
- Martha worried about everything ... *everything*...
- Zacchaeus was too small...
- Paul was too religious...
- And, Lazarus went and died...

What do you think about that? Do you feel better now? Today, we're dealing with another GIANT we all have to face from time to time—THE GIANT OF FAILURE. If you're a living, breathing human being, you'll relate to this message! And, in case you were wondering, I want you to know that *God didn't make a mistake—any mistakes—in choosing us*—including the fathers we celebrate today. That's what God meant to do ... *for his glory!* Just listen to what Paul says today (2 Corinthians 4:7-10, 16-18, NLT)...

We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. ⁸We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. ⁹We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. ¹⁰Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

¹⁶That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. ¹⁷For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

Paul, in our scripture lesson for today ... presents to us several key contrasts: hard times ... and good times, things we can see ... and things we can't see, things that are here today ... and things that will still be here tomorrow. He sets up *4 crucial paradoxes*

that will help us face THE GIANT OF FAILURE—*biblical principles, related to failure*. Here's the first:

WE FAIL NOW ... TO SUCCEED LATER. Verse 17, again, tells us: “For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!” The GOOD NEWS today is this: *Jesus brings about great reversals in our lives*, sometimes when we least expect it; have you ever noticed that? It may seem like we're failing right now, but hang on; God will show us what's ahead real soon ... and God's timing is perfect!

Let me share with you what happened to me right after Jane and I were married. I had only known Jane for about a year when we were wed, which meant that *I had known her folks less than a year*. But, I promised them—in marrying her—that I would care for their youngest daughter. I had a good job. I had good insurance. She would be well cared for...

We got married on June 3, 1978 ... and went to Door County on our honeymoon. After returning home, I went into work bright and early on a Monday morning, going directly to my desk. Almost as soon as I sat down, my boss (Mel Gust) came over and talked to me. He explained to me that the first thing I needed to do was to ... *clean out my desk!* I asked him what I'd done wrong—a bit in shock. His response was, “No, no ... I'm cleaning my desk out, too!” While gone on our honeymoon, the company I worked for had gone bankrupt!

I cleaned out my desk, stalled as long as I could, then went home to tell Jane. I didn't talk to my new in-laws for the next few weeks ... and didn't want Jane to either. Folks, after I'd promised them that I'd take care of their daughter, *I felt like a failure...*

I kept in touch with my boss for two weeks, Jane and I praying every day; then, I was soon on my way to Milwaukee to interview with a new company. Jane went with me to Milwaukee. She wasn't impressed with my new boss, but she was impressed that I'd be employed in the next few days ... and my new salary was ... 1/3 again *more* than what I'd been making before, with complete benefits!

Sometimes, when we fail now ... it's only so we can succeed—in even greater ways—later! The best may indeed be yet to come ... if we're listening to the right voice! Jesus is all about 'great reversals' in our lives, just when we need them the most. Here's something else...

WE FAIL IN THE INCIDENTAL ... TO SUCCEED IN THE IMPORTANT. Verse 18a states, “So we don't look at the troubles we can see now.” Are we looking at failure in life simply from *our present perspective ... or in light of God's eternal kingdom?*

The Apostle Paul is a good example here. He had his share of troubles, didn't he? *He* had people argue with him; *he* had people who threatened his life; *he* had people who literally stoned him—close to death at times; *he* ended up, at the end of his life ... in prison. But *he viewed all that went on in his life not from the bars of a prison window, but from the stars of an infinite heaven!* That was Paul's perspective ... and needs to be ours, too!

In light of the significance of God's business, the weight of our present issues begin to seem somewhat insignificant by comparison! *Are you looking, today, at failure simply from the perspective of your life ... or from the perspective of God's eternal kingdom?* Don't ever, ever forget, folks ... that with God, there's always a bigger picture... Next,

WE FAIL IN THE TEMPORARY ... TO SUCCEED IN THE ETERNAL. V. 18b explains: "...rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever." Your present preoccupation, many times, will be ancient history even within a few months time! Whatever your biggest concern is today ... more than likely won't be a concern at all in just a short period of time!

Shortly after my mother fell ill, about 2 ½ months before her death, every day she would say to whoever would listen, "I'm sorry..." not really understanding yet what God was doing for her. *Those final months of her life, however, were crucial for her being ready for eternity!* She still carried some significant emotional baggage from her childhood. In order to be ready to meet her Maker, she had to get those things dealt with! Suddenly, the things she'd hung on to throughout her life ... weren't very important anymore. God made a way ... and gave her time ... to let them go; he was preparing her for something bigger than what she had in mind. And, she and God had the time to get everything just right before death!

In a sense, she felt, after falling ill, that she'd really let my father down ... and her children ... and her grandchildren. I can still hear my dad telling us about this; every day she would say, "I'm sorry." But even those feelings faded as she got closer and closer to God during those final days. *What was temporary—what seemed like failure at the time—really didn't matter in light of eternity.* The only thing that mattered, after a few weeks of being ill, was being ready to meet God!

As I've said before, this is 'choir practice' for that great worship service that will last forever! It's all preparation for eternity! But the preparation is going to involve some failure ... so we can learn ... and grow. Keep that big picture in mind... Finally,

WE FAIL OUTWARDLY ... TO SUCCEED INWARDLY. Verse 18c (MSG) says, "Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace." Dr. David Jeremiah explains this way: "God loves us most deeply when we drop the pretenses, forget our all-important facades, and come to Him not like the proud Pharisee but like the trembling tax collector, who says: 'Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!'"

This truth becomes more and more clear to me, the older I get. We worry so much about appearances. This world we live in is absolutely *obsessed* with how we look on the outside! (Just watch T.V. for a couple of hours sometime; count how many commercials are about products that keep us young!) *We worry so much about the outside ... and God worries so little about it...*

What is God more concerned with? *You know!* Jesus returned time and time again to this subject: *the superficiality of the surface & the seriousness of the heart...*

We're all wrapped up in how we look to others; God's focus is on what we look like to Him... Again, as Pastor Jeremiah would say, "God loves us most deeply when we drop the pretenses, forget our all-important facades, and come to Him not like the proud Pharisee but like the trembling tax collector, who says: 'Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!'"

These, then—that we've been going over, are biblical principles to help us understand failure. But, how do we actually face THE GIANT OF FAILURE in our everyday lives? *We need a few smooth stones to hold in our hand as we face this GIANT, don't we? Let me end with this ammunition, available from God's word:*

- **ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR FAILURE**—whatever your part in it...
 - President Truman used to say, "The buck stops here!" This is the attitude we need to have about failure in our lives! *Wise believers deal with their past honestly ... before walking away from it!*
- **ACCEPT GOD'S FORGIVENESS...**
 - Psalm 103:10 tell us, "He does not punish us as we deserve or repay us according to our sins and wrongs." Folks, *God will not deal with you on the basis of your failures, but in the light of His grace!* (When you say, "But, I don't deserve that!" ... exactly! None of us do...)
- **APPLY THE LESSONS OF FAILURE TOWARD SUCCESS...**
 - *Failure is difficult enough, but failure without new learning is empty!* A.W. Tozer once said, "It is highly doubtful that God can use a [person] until [they] have hurt deeply"—or "until they have experienced *failure*."
- **ACCEPT FAILURE AS A FACT OF LIFE, NOT A WAY OF LIFE...**
 - Keep this concept at the *front* of your mind: FAILURE IS AN *EVENT*, NOT A PERSON! It is something you do, not something you become! Don't ever let anyone call you a failure or a loser; *YOU are NOT your résumé!*
 - *If you ever see yourself as a failure, it's because your view is based on a tragic misperception of yourself; that's not how God sees you!*
- **ARISE FROM FAILURE AND START AGAIN...**
 - There is no record, scripturally, of anyone wallowing in self-pity ... as a helpful strategy for life! You can spend years reliving less than memorable moments in your life, but the only wise thing to do is bring it before God, leave it at the foot of the cross, then know you can't take it back! As Jesus said to the lame man he healed at the Pool of Bethesda, "Rise up ... and walk!" Move on ... *with God! Here's a final thought...*

Scottish preacher Alexander Whyte offers this description of those who are in the process of discipleship—those who are (sometimes slowly) becoming more and more like Christ. He says...

***They fall down; they get up. They fall down; they get up...
...all the way to heaven!***

That should be a description of us ... all the way to heaven! It's a fact of life, folks. It's a fact of *our* lives! BUT ... as long as we listen to the voice of God, and not to the voices of the crowd, *the best is yet to come...*