

Failure

1. Warm up: When you were in school, what did you regard as your biggest failure at the time?

2. In Week 1 of our study of Moses, we saw how he got his start: floating in the basket on the Nile, discovered by Pharaoh's daughter, and adopted by her, so that he who was born into slavery became a Prince of Egypt. Clearly Moses was a child of destiny, brilliantly positioned by God to use his power, influence, and connections to advocate for his enslaved people. But then, something happened. Read Exodus 2:11-15, printed on p. 3.
 - a. Put yourself in Moses' shoes. Imagine you're a Prince of Egypt lifted out of slavery, but then you see a taskmaster mercilessly beating your cousin, aunt, or uncle. What would you feel? And what do you imagine you would do?
 - b. Now put yourself in God's shoes, as best you can. If you're God, why would you allow Moses to witness his relative being beaten? And what would you hope that would spur Moses to do?
 - c. Once Moses realized Pharaoh heard what he had done and intended to execute him, what thoughts and emotions must have surged through Moses?
 - d. It seems obvious that God didn't want Moses to murder the Egyptian taskmaster. What Moses did forced him into exile and undercut all the power, influence, and opportunity God had given him to advocate for his people. What Moses did was an epic failure. Many of us have been taught that when we fail, God becomes furious and lashes out at us. Who among us learned to see God that way when you were younger – and how did that affect you and your relationship with God?
 - e. After his epic moral failure, Moses fled into the Saini wilderness where he lived in obscurity for the next 40 years. How do you think Moses was thinking and feeling about his life and his relationship with God during those wilderness years?

3. As we read through the Bible, we see an amazing recurring pattern. Many of the Bible's greatest heroes at some point in their life did something so terrible, you'd think it would be disqualifying. Besides Moses, other examples include King David, Simon Peter, the Apostle Paul, and Mary the mother of Jesus. Yet God ended up using all of them in wonderful ways in spite of their epic failures.
 - a. Why do you think so many Bible heroes had so many moral lapses? Why didn't God choose better people?
 - b. As you look back over your life so far, what would you say has been your most regrettable moral failure? If you're not comfortable sharing that experience, pick some other lesser failure that you regret. How did your failure affect you at the time? How does it affect you now? And how did you respond to that failure?

4. Based on what we see in Moses' story and other scriptures, Jeff suggested three key steps God wants us to take when we fail. **Step 1 – Trade the distorted image of God as score-settler for God as grace. Receive grace!**
- a. Jeff shared the story of Scott Norwood and the amazing grace the people of Buffalo showed him after he missed a game-winning field goal in the 1990 Super Bowl. Tell us about a time in your own life when someone has shown you amazing grace. How did that feel? How did it affect you?
 - b. The Apostle Paul says, "By grace [we are] saved." Ephesians 2:5. What do you think that means?
 - c. Why is grace so powerful? Why is it the only thing that can save us?
 - d. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminded us how good human parents respond to their children and invited us to think of God like that, except even better. Jeff offered two examples of how good human parents respond: (a) Heather Havrilesky's article about her daughter's school talent show, which she described as "beautifully terrible;" and (b) Jeff and David's response to their cat habitually peeing over the top of her litter box. Both examples remind us that God knows our limitations, expects us to experience failures, and even finds our imperfection strangely endearing. Do you buy that last point? Do you think our flaws somehow further endear us to God? How do you feel about your own children and/or pets when they fail?
5. **Step 2 – Don't waste your failure; own it and learn from it.** Every failure is an opportunity to grow stronger and more beautiful. In the wilderness, Moses learned to tame his anger and to humble himself. He learned the importance of listening to God before acting. He learned to seek to channel God's power instead of his own. And he learned that violence is not the answer.
- a. Actor Nick Nolte was once asked what is the most important piece of advice he would offer others based on his own life experience. Read his response on p. 3. Do you agree? Why is failure often our best teacher?
 - b. Tell us something important you learned from one of your epic failures in life.
6. **Step 3 – Move forward with confidence and hope.** In Jeremiah 29:11, God says, "I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future with hope."
- a. Do you feel that way about your future? Why or why not?
 - b. Tell us about someone you've know who God used mightily despite their flaws and failures.

Exodus 2:11-15

11 One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. ¹²He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, 'Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?' ¹⁴He answered, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?' Then Moses was afraid and thought, 'Surely the thing is known.' ¹⁵When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well.

Nick Nolte, when asked the best advice he could offer others based on his life experience, said:

“This is going to sound strange but . . . , it's only through losing that we grow. We don't grow by winning. Sometimes our greatest losses can become our most profound teachers. It's great to win. But a fair amount of losing is what makes us progress as people.”