

Gateway Fellowship Church

Marathon Faith

Part Nine-Don't let failure define you

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In a Marathon Faith, don't let failure chain you down. When I first met Hannah it was hard for me not to pursue her, ok? My wife got it going on. Some of ya'll don't need to amen. That's for me! It was hard for me not to pursue her, but she just wanted to be friends. Like right off the bat she just put me in friend zone. Ya'll know what I am talking about, right? I would ask her out on a date and say, "Hey girl, can I take you out on a date?" Her immediate response was "Nope". Or other times when I would say, "Do you want to go to dinner?" She would say, "Ya, I will go to dinner. I also invited my friend Ashley." I would say in my mind, "I don't even like Ashley, why is she coming?" She would just friend zone me really quick. One day I asked her if she wanted to go to the movies? She said yes. I was like, "Ok, who do you want to bring?" She said, "No one, just me." I was like, "Yes Lord, favor!" So, we went to the movies. But she wanted to make it very known and clear to me that we were going just as friends. This was like the ultimate failure for me. In my mind I was thinking, "I got a date" and she quickly shot that down with "just as friends." It was such a failure moment. In a Marathon Faith, don't let failure chain you down. Now Hannah said, "Let's make sure we get there at the same time, so I can pay for my ticket, so you don't pay for mine and even get a hint that this is somehow a date." That's how evil she was, ok? But fellas, I showed up to the movies two hours early! Yes! Single guys take notes! I showed up two hours early, bought the tickets, she showed up and I told her, "Oh look what I have" just---smooth. We go to the movie and I remember I spent a lot of money. I bought movie theater popcorn. I was one of those like, "I still have bills, but I can still buy popcorn." We got popcorn, we go into the movie and we are talking back and forth through the previews. Then all of the sudden the movie starts. Now, the movie that we decided to go see, we were both interested in it. It was a sequel, and a comedy, and it was PG-13. How bad could it be? This was probably one of the worst dating decisions I have ever made. The movie became very awkward in the first few minutes. It was too raunchy for me. Like, the jokes I shouldn't be laughing at, not just because I was on a potential date, but as a Christ follower. Then jokes had me telling myself, "Oh Jesus, please forgive me." You ever had a moment like that where in the moment you were like, "Father forgive me for I have sinned"? Then it was made worse as I thought about what this girl that I liked MUST be thinking about me. I imagined Hannah thinking, "Oh ya, this is a man of God, Lord?" I really thought she was going to write a letter to Gateway Fellowship Church and say, "Are you sure that Chris is one of YOUR pastors?" I had that moment. It got so awkward and so uncomfortable I didn't know whether to laugh or get up and leave. We didn't know that we both felt

uncomfortable. I decided to be a gentleman, even though I had already lost my credibility, and I walked her to her car which she had parked very far away due to the traffic that night. So, the whole time we are walking I am saying these words, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry; I didn't know." It wasn't just such a moral failure for me, but I think I have also failed with this date. I just knew she was never going to talk to me again. To the point that whenever I opened her car door I said these words, "It was nice knowing you", and I gave her a high five! It was one of those. In a Marathon Faith, you don't let failure chain you down.

Failure in your life will happen. Failure in your life is inevitable. Actually, Paul wrote to the church in Rome and said, "For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." You in this room are amongst the crowd of people that have failed. I don't want you to feel isolated as if you are the only person who has ever failed or made a mistake. You're amongst the crowd of people who have ever failed. Here's the problem though: So many of us get comfortable in our failures. So many of us get comfortable in the inevitable that we will fail to the point where we say, "Sin is not even such a big deal. I know it's going to happen, so let it happen." See failure is a big deal. But I think even more so that it's not just the failure moment, but it's how we respond to failure. That's really important, really what counts. When some people fail, they let failure define them. To the point where they say, "I messed up. This is who I am. I am a failure." Do you let failure define you? Do you let failure become your identity? I think there are some people in this room who had a hard time this past week while trying to talk about an Audacious, Big Faith. Why? Because our failure is stomping on our ability to dream. Some of us in this room have failures of our past, failures in our lives, that are literally chaining us down from moving forward with God. Or, some of us have overcome our failures, but fail to help others overcome theirs. That's a discipleship issue.

Today, we are going to talk about this one guy who dealt with failure. As a matter of fact, this biblical man experienced failure to the point where he almost didn't experience God's promise on his life. If you have your bibles, please turn with me to Judges 16. That is the Old Testament. Judges 16. We are going to look at the life of Samson. Now some of us may have heard this story of Samson and Delilah. Samson with his long luscious locks. We read it, or maybe you heard it in kids' church. We will discover that are some principles in the story of Samson that will help us overcome the failures in life. What is going on before the scripture in Judges 16? God is making a covenant with Samson's parents. A covenant is a promise with God that comes with a blessing, and with consequences. Samson's parents make this covenant with God that Samson will be born and raised to deliver the Israelites away from the Philistines. The Philistines being the enemy and have dominion over the Israelites. When Samson is born they make this covenant with God that if Samson doesn't cut his hair, then God will give him supernatural strength. Samson was obedient, and he became super strong to the point where he is defeating armies by himself. (Judges 15) Hundreds, thousands of people. He is defeating armies by himself. He is literally breaking down the gates of the city and carrying them on his back. He is that strong. He got to the point where he is even demolishing these fierce animals. He kills a lion with his bare hands and then eats from the carcass. That is like Man vs Wild sort of stuff right there. He is that strong. But in Judges 16, we see him experience one of the biggest failures in his life. Let's read. Judges 16 starting in vs 4, "After it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lord to the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and find out where

his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver." Let me break it down so you will know what is going on. The Philistines keep being defeated by this one guy. Can you imagine being the leaders of the Philistines armies and there is one guy you can't beat? You would probably get really frustrated. So, they take all their money that they have and pool it together to give to this woman. They say to her, "Will you entice him, entice Samson, and figure out where is his weakness?" Here's what you need to know today: The enemy doesn't attack your strengths. He finds your weakness. He doesn't look at the things that you are strong at and say, "I'm going to overpower them." No! He tries to find the area of your life that you neglect. The area in your life that you haven't paid much attention to. He wants to find this weakness in your life, and then he attacks. For some of us, that weakness might be our marriage. Where we haven't loved our spouse how the bible tells us to love our spouse. It's become a weakness and the enemy attacks your marriage. Or some of us are disobedient in discipling our children, and the enemy attacks. Some of us are not good stewards of our finances and it's become a weakness and so he attacks. If the enemy were looking at your life, what would be the weakness that he would find? For Samson, it was his pride and his lust of the flesh. Delilah sees this and is persistent and starts asking Samson, "Where did you find your strength?" He lies to her and she tests him, and we find out that is not where his strength comes from. She does this four separate times trying to find out how he got strong and tests him four times. In vs 16 it says this, "And it came to pass, when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death." Now, this isn't anything spiritual, but this is to my ladies out there. Can you ladies please do us guys a favor? Don't pester us daily to the point of "Oh gosh, I just want to die!" I'm just trying to help some fellas out in here. Some of ya'll are nudging saying Yes in Jesus name. Vs 17, "that he told her all his heart, and said to her, "No razor has ever come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man."

Samson gave away his secret. Now, if we were reading this for the first time, or even just glancing over this, we may get the assumption of "Man, what is in his shampoo that makes his hair so strong, right?" We may wonder why his hair is giving him so much strength. His hair was never giving him strength. That's a false assumption. The hair was a representation, was a symbol, of Samson's obedience to trust in the Lord and His promises. It was symbolic. There was nothing special about his hair. Here's how I know. Ready? I always wondered why in this story they had to ask Samson four separate times where his strength comes from? I always thought that Samson was a really buff dude. He was big and muscular, Polynesian with tribal tattoos all over. I imagined Samson looked like Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, but with hair, because The Rock is bald. I imagined him like that. But if we saw Samson buff like that, tearing down city walls, doing all these muscular things, would we question where his strength comes from? No! We would probably think this guy works out. He's on the keto diet. We would just make this assumption because of the way he looks, that he is probably strong and that's where his strength comes from. But no, no, no. When they asked him four separate times, it's because they looked at him and couldn't see it.

The thing about Samson's strength is not so much that he was a muscular guy, but he had a supernatural strength because the spirit of God was IN him. Some of us are wondering how we can get strength. It's

not really about anything that we do but rather inviting more of the Holy Spirit into our lives. Samson has this moment where he tells Delilah this is where my strength comes from and gives away his secret. What he is really doing is breaking his covenant with God. He loses sight of the trust in God and the promises. He really gets caught up, and why? Because of pride. Because of his pride and the lust of his flesh. As strong as Samson was, he couldn't conquer himself. I want us to really understand this. Our selfish desires can become the root of our failures. When everything is all about me. What I want. My preference. When I come into this building I better get some coffee and tacos. This building better have the AC turned on. I don't want to worship to this song. I don't want to raise my hands. I don't want to tithe. I, I, I, I can be the thing that disconnects you from God and separates you.

In verse 19 it says this, then she lulled him to sleep on her knees and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson." So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him. I don't know about you all, but that is the scariest thing to think through. What would you do if the Lord departed from you? See in this, Samson thinks he still has the presence of God on him not knowing the Lord departed from him. I don't know about you, but I don't want to be doing all of this Christian stuff if the Lord is not with me. I don't want to do it. Many of us think, well, God will never depart from me. He would never leave me or forsake me. He would never depart from me. That's because some of us have departed from Him. In Matthew chapter 7 there were some guys who thought the same way. They say, "Hey Jesus, didn't I prophesy in your name?" "Didn't I cast out demons in your name?" I went to church, belonged to a small group, got baptized and served in the kids' ministry. I did all this stuff. And God goes, "Yeah, but I never knew you. Depart from me." I think we get, in our American culture, that this is what it looks like to be a Christian, and we forget Jesus in the whole mix. So, the Lord departed from him. Can I clarify something? Failure is not just one moment, it's a series of compromises. With Samson, he thought he was all big, bad and strong and he started to push his limits. He started to compromise. It was cool when he killed the lion and ate from the carcass. But he was a Nazirite and Nazirites aren't supposed to touch anything that's dead. He pushed his limits. I'm big Samson, I can do what I want. He even fed that to his parents, making them stumble. Why? I'm Samson, and I can do what I want. He compromised. He married a Philistine woman, an enemy. He compromised.

I don't want us to be naïve in thinking that our big failure moments on this earth come out of nowhere. I don't want you to be naïve to think that your failure moments just got birthed overnight. No. It started with a thought. It started with a look. It started with one act. It started small with a compromise. Let me give you an example. Let's say that they left hand represents us. The right hand represents God. This piece of paper, as thin as it is, represents just one small sin. Just one small compromise. Just that one, in between you and God (folds hands on top of each other with paper in the middle) still brings a divide. The reality is there is no small sin. It all hurts the heart of God. It starts with compromise after compromise. Samson after having his failure moment is thrown into prison. They torture and torment him. They even gouge out his eyes so that he can no longer see. They made him a slave. Think through that. He went from defeating the enemy to feeding the enemy. They chained him to a mill where he is walking around like he is literally an animal trying to make this grain. All the humiliation. Samson could

have quit in that moment. I think he realized in that moment that he couldn't let failure chain him down. In his last few moments, he had a moment with God. The Philistines took him out of his cell and chained him to two pillars, and they mocked him. It was well known that when an army would win a fight, they would all sing a song of victory. To mock him, they made Samson sing that song in humiliation. Samson has this one moment with God in verse 28. 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 one on his left. The Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then 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. God's promise for Samson was fulfilled. With failure, you can either keep falling, or start fighting. Unfortunately, I see too many of us put our failures behind us and never fight against them. This is a visual of what it looks like (wraps a chain around his leg and attaches the chain to a cinder block) when we allow failure to chain us down. It's like we had a brick, tied to a chain, and wrapped around our ankle. See when failure keeps you down, it keeps you from moving forward. You may think "Those are the things of God and I really want to go...the chain pulls." "I really want to surrender my life to Jesus and I am going to go to the altar and surrender my life to him, and your failure said no....and the chain pulls." "I want to join a small group, and your failure says, you're bad at relationships...and the chain pulls." "I want to get baptized and proclaim Jesus in my life, and your failure says you can't, there's people watching....and the chain pulls." This is what it looks like to be chained down by your failures. I imagine that Samson, when he was chained in his cell, was going through some of these same emotions. Guilt, fear, pain that he can't move forward from his mistakes. In his cell though, we remember that he is blind. He has a sensory overload about other things in his life. He decides I need to start fighting. He feels his head where his hair was there before. He starts to feel new hairs growing. Now Samson didn't say, "This is my strength now coming out." No! It was a reminder for him on how to begin fighting and to trust in the promises of God. While he is having this moment of surrender with God, he is realizing that he was never the strength; that God did everything for him. He never defeated the armies. God defeated the armies. He was never the strong one. God was the strong one. If you're going through some failures, you need to trust in the promises of God again.

Prayer

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