

May 7, 2023

I'm Still Standing!

{based on Luke 22:24-34}

Nobody wants to fail, and God did not create you to fail. In Ephesians 2:10, we learn, "God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us new people, so that we would spend our lives doing the good things he had already planned for us to do".

And then in 2 Tim. 1:9, "God saved us, and chose us to be his holy people, but not because of anything we ourselves did".

God saved us and made us his people because that was what he wanted and because of his grace. That grace was given to us through Christ Jesus before time began.

When you experience failure, or abuse or have been full of worry, often the last thing you want to do is to take a risk, embrace change, or try again. These however, are the very things you need to do, and must do, if you are truly to live an authentic life from the inside out.

You were not created for fear. You were not created to be shackled by negative emotions or memories. You were created to live out a bold, dynamic, creative life, filled with expressions of love and joy.

So, how do we bolster our courage to step into this new mindset? Well, for one thing, we can quit dwelling on past failures! Faults and failures are a part of life, so let's just accept that fact from the get-go.

When you fail, pick yourself up and dust yourself off and start over again - choose to move forward. We only really fail when we don't get up!

Of course, the flip side of this personal insight, is that it's time to recognize that others around us have faults too, and yes, they have failed also. The trick is to not get stuck in those moments, either in our own failures or in theirs. We all fall short of the glorious potential God has placed inside us.

In truth, failure is part of life's learning process. God never calls you a failure when you fall. God never rejects you when you fall. Instead, He reaches out with great Love.

So, if God's purpose is for us to learn by our actions, then each 'unsuccessful' outcome should be examined to see where the downward spiral began. What is salvageable and what would we change if given the opportunity for a re-do? Identify any risk worth taking.

Let's look at Peter's failure - we'll call this the *award-winning* failure trophy. Peter failed Jesus and failed Him miserably. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."

Jesus replied, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."

Later, when Jesus was arrested and taken into the high priest's house, Peter followed at a distance. By not walking close to Him or standing near Him, Peter wouldn't be identified as being 'with' Him.

A man who follows at a distance is not focusing on Christ. His mind and life are not fixed upon the Lord. His commitment is weak; therefore, he is easily distracted by the world, and drawn into its ways.

Later in the story, Luke tells us that some of the people who had earlier shouted for Jesus to be crucified, lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard, and as they sat together, Peter sat down with them. We could consider this crowd as a representation of a world of rejecters of Jesus.

This is one definite mistake that Peter made! Do not sit among rejecters of your destiny. Do not sit with the crowd who are trying to kill your purpose, your dreams, your hopes.

This is the first time when Peter denied his Lord. When asked if he was a follower of Jesus, Peter replied, "Woman, I do not know Him."

Peter became infected with the same life-force spreading throughout that crowd. After a little while, another saw him and said, "You also are one of them."

With Peter's response, "I am not!", he was definitely denying that he was a disciple, a follower of Jesus. Peter was falling, progressing more and more into sin. He was denying Jesus because he was standing among the Lord's rejecters.

Then came the third accusation, "Surely this fellow also was with Him, for he is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying!" Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.

This was the denial that claimed ignorance, "I do not know what you are talking about; I know absolutely nothing about the matter." In Matthew and Mark's version of this story, Peter's emotions just burst forth in cursing and swearing a forceful denial of any knowledge whatsoever about Jesus.

This denial occurred about one hour after the previous one. Peter's failure was a deteriorating failure. At first, he pretended not to know Jesus. Then he fell even farther, insistently denying being a disciple. He claimed total ignorance of all knowledge of Jesus.

This is the point: Peter stayed in the crowd, still stood around the rejecters of Jesus—even after they had led him to deny Jesus twice. He was trying to be one of the crowd, when he should have been off praying and seeking to understand the ways of God.

Luke 22:61 tells us, "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times'."

Apparently while the rooster was crowing, the Lord, standing in the chamber of the palace, turned around and caught the eye of Peter. And Peter, eye to eye with the Lord, remembered the words the Lord had spoken to him: "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you..."But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

In the midst of all His own pain and suffering, Jesus' look, told Peter that His Lord had not forgotten him. Jesus still loved and cared for Him and wanted his loyalty and service. Jesus had prayed for Peter, and the power of that prayer was now moving in Peter's heart and life.

Peter now remembered His Lord's words and those words began to take effect. Then Peter went out and wept bitterly. Peter left as fast as he could from the courtyard, through the gate, out into the night to be alone, at last, with God. He was broken, full of anguish and pain for having failed his Lord.

1 John says, "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things". Even though Peter denied the Lord three times, God still had a purpose for him. We must believe that God is greater than any sin, failure, disappointment, rejection, we go through.

When Peter returned to the eleven, he had a new purpose, a new mission, and following the resurrection, their commitment to spread the Good News was cemented.

Peter's voice carried the message: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And that number has continued to multiply over the centuries.

We are all disciples of Jesus, and I know this because you are here today and every other Sunday, willing to be open to learning more about 'living in the Lord.'

Let us press forward in life with thanksgiving.

Those things that could have destroyed us, have not.

Those things that should have made you weaker, have actually made you stronger, because you survived them.

You may already know the name Joni (not Joan-y...she was named after her father John, a one-time member of the American Olympic Wrestling Team) Eareckson.

Joni led an active life, riding horses, hiking, playing tennis, and swimming.

When she was 17, she dove into Chesapeake Bay after misjudging the shallowness of the water.

This 'mistake' left her paralyzed from the shoulders down.

During her two years of rehabilitation, Joni experienced anger, depression, suicidal thoughts and, although a confirmed Christian, turned her back on her faith.

During occupational therapy, she learned to paint with a brush between her teeth and she began selling her artwork.

She figuratively 'picked herself up' and about ten years later, founded an organization to accelerate Christian ministry in the disability community throughout the world.

In 2014, a film was made entitled "Alone Yet Not Alone".

Joni sang the title song.

With limited lung capacity due to her disability, Joni had her husband, Ken, push on her diaphragm while she recorded the song, to give her enough breath to hit the high notes.

For this song, she was nominated for an Oscar.

You can watch Joni sing an updated version of this song, and others, on YouTube.

In 2010 Joni had been diagnosed with Stage III breast cancer.

She underwent a mastectomy and chemotherapy and the treatment was successful...she was declared cancer-free.

In 2018 Joni was diagnosed with a malignant nodule on her chest wall.

Radiation treatments proved successful, and once again she was declared cancer-free.

Throughout the course of her life, Joni has had hardships, but once she took the initial 'step' to move forward, there was no looking back.

To her credit, she has been successful as a painter, a singer, an author and even as an actress starring as herself in an autobiographical movie.

She has received numerous accolades, including honorary degrees from eight universities, to say nothing of other awards, one of which was for her book, "When God Weeps".

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is alive.

Draw closer to Him, you won't regret it.

You deserve the peace you seek.

The Holy Spirit will help you, encourage you, and guide you to fulfil your destiny.

Please open your hearts to change, and let Him in. AMEN