

SESSION 6: TRANSFORMATION THROUGH FAILURE



WORSHIP: Wait for the Lord

READINGS: 2 Samuel 12: 1-13;
Luke 15: 11-31

SUMMARY OF SERMON

One of the great lessons in life we all have to learn is how to deal with disappointment and failure. We often think of failure in terms of doing wrong

- and sometimes failures are large and deliberate sins. King David's adultery and murder were extreme failures. You could say the same about the younger son's rejection of his Father, and determination to go his own way, ending in total personal disaster. But there is also a bigger picture of disappointment, and falling short of expectations. After Peter denied Christ three times, he came to realise what he had done and wept bitterly because he felt ashamed, having let himself down and, in the process, endangered Jesus' life. Failure doesn't always mean doing outright wrong. It can be about not living up to expectations, not reaching a target, failing to achieve a goal. And that can lead to frustration and anger. The question is, how can we, with God's help, handle those times and turn them into "transformational positivity". Can our failures have a deeper purpose? Can they lead to blessing? Can we see where God is when things seem to go so wrong? How can we be "down, but not out?". The key, for David, was to come before God in confession and repentance, and receive God's mercy, forgiveness and grace for a new start. He then served as one of Israel's greatest Kings. For the prodigal son, it was the point when he came to himself and realised what he had done. And as soon as he approached home, with nothing left to his name after squandering his inheritance, his Father rushed out and embraced him. What a beautiful picture of restoration and recovery from failure! Peter, too, once restored by Jesus and given the opportunity to proclaim his true love for The Lord, was then commissioned for his life's work as a follower of Jesus Christ. In every case, we see a pattern of repentance and faith in God's loving mercy: "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Sometimes we set ourselves unrealistic expectations of what we can do. That may arise from our own intellectual pride, self confidence in our own wisdom, or a desire to be independent of God-given boundaries - rather like the prodigal son. At times when we are tempted to think that all would be different if we ruled the world, we need to learn how to "reframe" our situation and remind ourselves that we are human beings, made in God's image, part of a creation that awaits God's renewal and resurrection. Even if we feel we have failed, we can experience the joy of being fully *transformed* through that cycle of **repentance** - turning back to put God at the centre, and reframing how we see ourselves in God's world - through **faith** in His gracious promise to meet us in mercy and renewal, and through **hope** in the promise of God's new world in which our failings and frustrations will pass away.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- Can failure have a bigger purpose? Can you think of some examples - either personal or on a bigger scale - of apparent “failures” that have been turned into blessings? What lessons have you learned from failures in your own experience?
- Discuss some common causes of failure and how they might have been avoided.
- Will Cookson, in a recent sermon in our church, quoted Churchill’s words: “Success is going from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm” and then followed the quote with these words: “I love failure...God can do something with me when I fail”. What do you think he meant by that?
- ***“For many of us, not least when our hands have been burned and our dreams have been shattered, ‘once bitten, twice shy’ becomes our mantra. ‘Never again’ ‘Aim low to avoid disappointment’. Regularly we need to allow God to keep reshaping the dreams that we have for him and his kingdom to ensure that they remain his dreams and not solely ours. Sometimes we will need to lay them down - for a season, or possibly, and no doubt painfully, altogether. But with the God of resurrection, there will always be a new beginning”*** (Mark Bradford, Encountering the Risen Christ). Sometimes we set unrealistic expectations, and experience failure and disappointment. Discuss your experience of this, and how you have “reframed” your situation by turning to put God back at the centre of everything.
- What has happened since we last met together? What have we put into practice since our last study? What is the Spirit teaching us in this study and how will we aim to be fruitful as a result?
- Reflect on these words and consider what they might be saying to us:

I asked for health that I might do greater things
I was given infirmity that I might do better things

I asked God for strength that I might achieve
I was made weak that I might learn to obey

I asked for riches that I might be happy
I was given poverty that I might be wise

I asked for power and the praise of men
I was given weakness to sense my need of God

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life
I was given life that might enjoy all things

I got nothing I asked for but everything I hoped for
In spite of myself my prayers were answered -
I am among all men most richly blessed.

PRAYING TOGETHER

Spend time together in prayer for one another, praying especially for those who are experiencing disappointment and who feel that they have failed. Ask that God might show them how to turn the situation into something positive, transforming the failure into a blessing.