

Sermon Series: Growing Pains—Lord of Life Lutheran Church—7/30/2000

Title: “*Growing through Failure*”

Text: Psalm 103: 1-18

Introduction: “*Failure or Opportunity?*”

Theme: As human beings we experience the unpleasantness of failure because of our fallen sinful nature. Yet, because we are redeemed in Christ, even our moments of failure can be turned into opportunities through which we can grow

Focus on God’s redeeming opportunity rather than our past failure (print verses vs. 1-5)

- When failure is our focus, we play the “blame game”
 1. We want to find someone at fault to calm a screaming conscience—God, others, circumstance—but eventually the hot potato of guilt ends up right back in our own lap
 2. **Illus.: No one righteous**
- When we remember God’s mercy, we are reminded of how he has remedied our past
 1. David starts the recounting of God’s blessing by stating, “*And forget none of his benefits, who pardons all your wickedness.*”
 2. Part of what *redemption* is all about is that God can take broken things and make “all things new again.” (*He satisfies completely your years good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle.*)
 3. **Illus.: Broken Things**

Knowing what to do with our present failure (print verses. 6-14)

- Go from hoping for a reprieve to living under pardon (“*He pardons all your iniquities...He will not reward us according to our iniquities.*”)
 - **Illus.: The national debate about pardons of death role inmates**
- Go from blaming to claiming (“*The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy.*”)
- Go from fear to hope (*As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*)
- Go from insecurity to security (“*As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.*”)

Insulating ourselves from the guilt-driven perfectionism in the future (print verses. 15-18)

- Rejecting two real pressures that intensify our pain of failure
 1. Living and dying on the expectations/guilt of others
 2. Not willing to forgive ourselves as God has forgiven us (vs. 11, 12)
 3. “*We make it our aim. . .to be pleasing to Him.*” 2 Cor. 5: 9
- Resisting the major problem that perpetuates the defeat of failure
 1. Avoid a preoccupation with unrealistic standards (*perfectionism*)
 - We have to learn that we are only as strong as God’s gifts us and as weak as the next temptation
 - Avoiding the “superman syndrom” in our lives, family, and career
 - **Illus.: Loving Losers**
 2. Let God be perfect through you
 - “*For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.*” (Vs. 14)
 - “*We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves.*” 2 Cor. 4: 7
- Resurrected to a more powerful way of living in Christ
 1. We live within the tensions of the two natures within our human frame
 - Our old, sinful self which is challenged by Christ to be different from the rest of the world
“*You shall be perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.*” Matt 5: 48
 - Our new nature in Christ which is transformed and empowered to live differently
“*For the love of Christ compels us...if any person is in Christ, they are a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*” 2 Cor. 5: 14, 17
 2. Choosing ways that intentionally avoid the past failures because our eyes have been opened (**precepts-18**)
 - We live in a relationship (covenant) with the Owner (18)
 - We have been given “oversight” of our life so that we approach it from a different perspective

— ILLUS.: GOING FROM HIRED HAND TO PARTNER

Failure or Opportunity?

Somebody asked Winston Churchill one time, "What most prepared you to lead Great Britain through World War II?" For a period of time, Great Britain stood virtually alone against Nazi Germany as it dominated the Western World. This was Churchill's response: "It was the time I repeated a class in grade school." The questioner said, "You mean you flunked a grade?" Churchill said, "I never flunked in my life. I was given a second opportunity to get it right."

No One Righteous

In *The Divine Intruder*, James R. Edwards writes: Like many people, I was shocked by the catastrophe on Mount Everest in May 1996 in which a dozen mountaineers perished. One of the most disturbing sideshows in that circus of tragedies was the story of two Japanese climbers who in their summit bid bypassed three injured, starving, and freezing climbers. The Japanese had sufficient provisions to render aid to the stranded climbers, but they did not want to jeopardize their ascent by stopping to assist them. As a result, all three climbers died. Later, when asked why they had not stopped to help, one of the climbers said, "We were too tired to help. Above 8,000 meters [26,000 feet] is not a place where people can afford morality." The actions of the two climbers and the statement attempting to justify them were, in my judgment, a callous and contemptible example of egoism. On a number of occasions I retold the story in my preaching and teaching to illustrate the true face of egoistic ethics, base and unjustifiable—and doubly so in the mountains, where the dangers inherent in climbing should make all climbers their brothers' keepers.

A few years later, while leading a college study tour to the Middle East, I was hiking up Mount Sinai in the darkness before dawn in order to be on the summit at sunrise. The hike up 7,500-foot Mount Sinai is tame in comparison to Mount Everest, where oxygen deprivation impairs physical exertion and judgment itself. As my students and I neared the top of Mount Sinai we were passed by two Bedouins carrying a man down the mountain. The man was unconscious. His sporadic breathing, rattled and gurgling, indicated he was in critical condition. He was, I suspected, suffering from pulmonary edema, a malady of mountaineering caused by ascending too rapidly. Pulmonary edema is fatal unless the climber affected is taken rapidly to a lower altitude. For a brief moment I considered halting my ascent and helping the Bedouins carry the man down the mountain. But my desire to make it to the top checked my impulse. Without further thought, I gave one of the Bedouins my flashlight and continued upward. *They seem to be doing all right by themselves*, I assured my uneasy conscience.

The sunrise from the summit was glorious, but it was overshadowed by what transpired on the way down. Not far below the place where we had passed the Bedouins, a figure draped with a blanket was lying on the ground. Two shoes protruded from under the blanket. The man carried by the Bedouins was dead. Whether he died while being carried down, or was put down and died, I do not know. I do know, however, that every step down the mountain smote my conscience. What I had found so loathsome in the two Japanese climbers on Everest had been essentially repeated in my own action on Mount Sinai.

Broken Things

God uses broken things. Broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grain to give bread, broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume. It is Peter, weeping bitterly, who returns to greater power than ever.

Loving Losers

Many of Charles Schultz's cartoon panels have two characters outside, at night, staring at a field of stars. Charlie Brown says in one, "Let's go inside and watch television. I'm beginning to feel insignificant."

Psalm 103:1-18

¹Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name.

²Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget none of His benefits;

³Who pardons all your iniquities;
Who heals all your diseases;

⁴Who redeems your life from the pit;
Who crowns you with mercy and compassion;

⁵Who satisfies your years with good things,
So *that* your youth is renewed like the eagle.

⁶The LORD performs righteous deeds,
And judgments for all who are oppressed.

⁷He made known His ways to Moses,
His acts to the sons of Israel.

⁸The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
Slow to anger and abounding in mercy.

⁹He will not always strive *with us*;
Nor will He keep *His anger* forever.

¹⁰He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him.

¹²As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

¹³Just as a father has compassion on *his* children,
So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.

¹⁴For He Himself knows our frame;
He is mindful that we are *but* dust.

¹⁵As for man, his days are like grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.

¹⁶When the wind has passed over it, it is no more;
And its place acknowledges it no longer.

¹⁷But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him,
And His righteousness to children's children,

¹⁸To those who keep His covenant,
And who remember His precepts to do them.