

More About Jesus

How Do I Deal With Failure?

or

Leave It To Your Friend!

I am in a ring. A boxing ring. My gloves are on and I am ready to fight. My tag partner is waiting outside the ring. My eyes are cast down on the canvas which begins to shake and tremble.

I look up, and discover to my slackjawed horror, that my opponent is bigger than I am! He weighs in at 1,500 pounds, stands over 12 feet tall and has loose flesh hanging about his jaw. He has a slanted forehead.

If I were smarter, I wouldn't even dream of going up against him, but somehow I'm strangely confident. After all, he looks very old-perhaps about 7,000 years any way.

The bell rings and we rise. Before I take my second step toward him, a three foot glove meets my face and I'm out cold. The next round I am somewhat apprehensive. I plan a new strategy of attack, but the same three foot glove crashes into my head and I'm out again.

My partner has an anxious look of pity on His face, but I'm still confident. Every time I rise to fight, he leans into the ring so I can tag Him. But I don't. After all, someone once told me that he was only the son of a carpenter.

After a thousand rounds with my 1,500 pound opponent I become discouraged and think to give up. Somehow I am not doing so well.

In my discouragement, I begin talking to my tag partner. I can't believe how understanding He is! I discover that He understands my grief and a new bond of friendship begins to develop between us.

I discover that He has fought before. He drops a few names of His former partners. There was Able, a shepherd; and a man named Enoch; a ship builder

called Noah; a father named Abraham and his son Isaac; even a woman by the name of Sarah. The list gets longer-Joseph, a leader in Egypt; Moses, a shepherd turned prophet; Samuel; David; and even a man named Paul. I am impressed!

The next time I go to battle, I notice my partner seems more anxious than ever to enter the ring. Our relationship has grown closer as we've spent time together and I can tell He wants to be tagged into the fight. At one point He even crawls into the ring to be closer to me.

Finally, as my opponent, full of confidence, stands towering over me, my heart fails. I want out. I'm tired of fighting. Just as I am about to be clobbered, I reach over and tag my partner. *In a flash* He is in the ring!

Through blackened eyes I notice that He enters with both hands stretched in the air, *the sign of victory!* And to my amazement, the 1,500 pound bully races out of the ring, completely overcome with fear. The battle has been won and my partner gives me the victory.

I soon discover that as long as I invite Him to remain in the ring, the enemy is always totally defeated. My partner and I now spend a lot of time together. I found out that He is not only a superb fighter, but He's a problem solver, a teacher, a comforter, a guide and my best friend.

Jesus has won the victory for us. And that victory-won upon a wooden cross-is still good today! Its good every day!

And I am convinced and sure of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ [right up to the time of His return], developing [that good work] and perfecting and bringing it to full completion in you. Philippians 1:6 (The Amplified Bible)

How Do I Deal With Failure?

1. Do the following texts fill you with hope and courage? Why?

- Matthew 5:48
- Romans 7:15-24
- 2 Corinthians 7:1

In Lesson Three we discovered that sin is really a broken relationship with God. We also discovered that “bad deeds” don’t keep God from loving us. God is interested in a relationship with us regardless of how we are “doing.” We often let our failures discourage us from seeking Him. In this lesson, we will look at how to deal with failure.

2. In a battle, before you can know *how* to fight, you have to know who the enemy is. According to the following texts, who is the enemy?

- Ephesians 6:12
- James 4:7

Can you see the enemy? If you could see him, is it even possible for you to overcome him?

3. Considering Jeremiah 13:23, how much can you do?

During World War II, the Allied Army placed fake plans for attack on the body of a dead airman and left him floating off enemy shores. The Germans found the “plans” and moved their troops to defend the location that was mentioned in them. The Allies then entered several undefended locations and it became a turning point in the war. When you fight the battle at the wrong location, you end up losing the war! In spiritual life, trying to overcome our bad habits is like fighting at the “wrong location.”

4. According to 1 Timothy 6:12 what is the right fight? How do you fight it?

Remember, faith is the same as trust. In order to trust somebody who is completely trustworthy, all I have to do is get to know them. Therefore, the “fight of faith” would be the effort to get better acquainted with my Friend, Jesus.

5. Read James 4:7-8 again, looking for two clues on how to “resist the devil.”

6. According to John 15:5, how much can you do apart from Jesus?

7. According to Philippians 4:13, how much can you do with Jesus?

8. If without Jesus I can do nothing, but with Him I can do everything, where should I put all my effort? (Did you notice “submit” and “draw near” in question five?)

9. In John 15:1-8, does Jesus command us to “bear fruit” or to “abide?” How many times does Jesus mention the words “abide” or “remain?” How would you apply this in dealing with failures in your life?

10. If we remain connected to Jesus (the Vine) what does He promise to do for us?

- Isaiah 59:19
- Philippians 2:13
- Philippians 1:6

It is not the responsibility of a garden to get rid of its weeds—that is the work of the Gardener. The garden’s responsibility is to absorb the water, sun, and nutrients that are provided. Jesus promises to fight our enemy (Satan) for us. He promises to make us healthy, “fruit bearing” Christians if we remain connected to Him (abide).

11. What assurance do we have while waiting for Him to finish His work?

- Romans 8:1
- John 5:24

You can choose two positions relative to the circle to the right-in or out. If we are “in” Jesus, we can have perfect confidence in His ability to save us and to change us as needed. Our focus (our work) is to get “in Jesus” and to stay “in Jesus!” We do this by spending time with Him for the purpose of getting to know Him as a friend!

If Bill Gates wrote you a check for 1 million dollars, you could deposit it knowing that it wouldn’t bounce. His name and his word are worth a lot. When Jesus says He started the work in you and He is going to finish it, you can go to the bank with that too. He’s given you His Word on it.

Daily Bites

This week, consider the time you spend with Jesus each day as your “spiritual victory!” Everything that you need will be provided by Jesus. The real battle is to keep coming to Him-in prayer, meditation, and Bible study. If you will continue coming to Him each day, for the purpose of getting to know Him better, in His time He will remove the desire for sin from your life and replace it with a deeper craving to know Him and to have fellowship with Him!

- *Begin each session with prayer* - maybe something like this: “Lord, help me to come to know you better as we spend time together...”
- *Read the passage* - several times noticing as many details as you can.
- *Imagine the setting* - put yourself in the picture. Try to imagine the sounds, smells, sensations.
- *Summarize the passage* - in your own words.
- *Apply the passage* - what message is God giving you?
- *Meditate and pray* - meditate on how this passage makes Jesus more real. Talk to Him about the passage and about using the information you have learned to deepen your friendship with Him. Listen for impressions He is giving you.

Passages for This Week

- John 13:1-17
- John 13:18-30
- John 13:31-14:4
- John 14:5-14
- John 14:15-31
- John 15:1-17
- John 15:18-27

In Her Own Words

Oh, I've seen Him. I've seen Him many times as He passed by with crowds on every side. I remember the first time! It was hard to be sure, but it seemed as if He paused to look right at me. His eyes were so filled with compassion that I had to look away - and He passed by. When I looked again, the only reminder of His passing was an eddy of dust settling upon the road.

Then one day, He passed again. I heard a large crowd and went to my window. He was there, in the center and they were headed toward the lake. I grabbed a shawl and hurried after them. If He was going to say something I wanted to hear it.

We stopped on a grassy hillside that gently sloped into Galilee. He was standing on the lake shore. From where we sat, reflected sunlight in the water at His back, created a halo effect about Him. A stillness spread over the crowd and then He spoke.

His words were like water to my parched soul. For a long time afterward, I lingered by-waiting for an opportunity to talk to Him. Finally He turned to me and in His eyes I saw the same welcome that His words had made me feel. I fell on the ground at His feet and wept.

Through bitter sobs I told Him the dark, ugly secrets of my life. He listened without condemnation and when I finished, He knelt beside me and prayed in my behalf. I felt my guilt and uncleanness drop away from me like the leaves of autumn. The winter in my life was over. Springtime had come.

Well, Jesus passed on to other towns, but I stayed in Magdala. Perhaps staying wasn't such a good idea, for the same old friends and clients kept coming around. It wasn't long before I found myself involved again in the life I had thought to leave behind. The old burden of guilt returned, along with sleeplessness and regret. I wished that Jesus lived in Magdala so I could go to Him for help.

I heard He was teaching at the north end of the lake, so one morning I set out to find Him. It wasn't difficult. When I got there, I saw a crowd gathered on the beach. Joining them, I discovered Jesus was teaching from a fishing boat anchored just off shore.

He was telling a story about a wayward son who journeyed to a far country and became involved in a life of sin. I could relate to the misery that boy felt as he fed pigs and thought of home! When Jesus pictured God rushing out to meet the returning prodigal, my heart leapt within me. There was even hope for people who knowingly became involved in sin. There was hope for me!

I found myself at Jesus' feet once more. Again I heard His prayers in my behalf, and felt the prodigal's joy in belonging to the family.

Sadly, I have to tell you my joy was shortlived. I returned to Magdala and my life of failure. But the Good News is that Jesus never gave up on me. Over the next few months our paths continued to cross, and each time I came into His presence, I felt welcome and forgiven. Finally, I determined *to stay in His presence*. And that is how I became a *transformed* follower of Jesus.

In the weeks that followed, I listened as He told us of the Father with stories I'll never forget. I saw the Father planting a vineyard and doing all possible for its growth (He even pulled the weeds). I saw Him preparing a wedding feast with a guest list that left out no one. On the darkest night, the Father was out looking for lost sheep. At midnight, He was helping a neighbor in need. He was the king who made the common man His friend.

He made the picture so clear! Just seeing Jesus, made me feel as though I had seen the Father. God loved through Jesus and as I watched Him, I began to understand where the love came from. He would rise up a great while before day and go out to some solitary place where He would pray. No matter how late He had gone to sleep or how tired He had been the night before, He always kept that appointment. Sometimes He would even spend entire nights in prayer and come forth refreshed and strengthened for another day.

I began to understand that *I could have* a relationship with His Father. In fact, He once said that eternal life was based on knowing God. At first I had difficulty believing God could be interested in spending time with someone like me. But as I watched Him in His Son, I knew it was true. Jesus mingled and mixed with common, everyday people, fisherfolk by the sea, farmers in the field, women at the well.

The Pharisees thought they slandered Him when they said, "He eats with publicans and sinners," but to me they were speaking precious truth! God became man and sat at the table with sinners! He was *my* Friend, and that has made all the difference!

Bible Texts

Matthew 5:48 “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

Romans 7:15-24* “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

2 Corinthians 7:1* “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”

Ephesians 6:12* “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

James 4:7 “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Jeremiah 13:23* “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.”

1 Timothy 6:12* “Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

James 4:7-8 “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

John 15:5* “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

John 15:1-8 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

Isaiah 59:19 “So shall they fear The name of the LORD from the west, And His glory from the rising of the sun; When the enemy comes in like a flood, The Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him.”

Philippians 2:13^ “for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

Philippians 1:6* “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Romans 8:1 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,”

John 5:24 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My words and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”

(Unless otherwise mentioned, all quoted scripture is from the New King James Version)

** New International Version*

^ New Revised Standard Version

Credits

More About Jesus

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