

## A FAITHFUL FAILURE

### Allowing God to redeem your mistakes!

By John Stanko

Have you ever failed miserably? Have you ever known anyone who has? If you've been around for long, the answer to both questions is a resounding "yes!" Then you are familiar with how difficult it can be to bounce back from a failure, especially if you are a believers. We somehow think that spiritual people will always do the right thing, and that a misstep or a failure is a sign that our spirituality is deficient.

Yet with faith, it is possible to be even stronger after a failure, as Peter, Moses, David and Abraham demonstrated. When I conduct seminars, I lead people through the following logic:

**Question:** Is failure a learning experience? **Answer:** Yes!

**Question:** Can we often learn more from failure than success? **Answer:** Yes!

**Question:** Are we always to be learning and growing? **Answer:** Yes!

**Question:** Then shouldn't we be failing as often as possible? **Answer:** No!

I consider the most significant redemptive failure in the Bible to be Samson. Samson is mentioned as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11, right along with Moses and Abraham. "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson" (Hebrews 11:32). When his name is mentioned, there is no asterisk or footnote pointing out what a colossal failure he was. In fact, it was Samson's faith during a time of failure that earned him his honorable mention in Hebrews 11.

Let's look at three important lessons from Samson's life that enabled him to become such a faithful failure. I'm going to assume you know Samson's story. If not, please take time now to read about him in Judges 13:1-16:31. (Even if you know his story, you may want to stop and read it again before you go on.)

1. **God is often leading you and you don't even know it.**

"Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife." His father and mother replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised

Philistines to get a wife?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me." (His parents did not know that this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel) (Judges 14:1-4).

God is working in your life to fulfill your purpose whether you realize it or not. It doesn't matter what you can see or understand. Faith requires that you trust God that He is at work in your life, even in the failures and hardship. Once I was driving someplace and I got lost, which made me late for an important meeting. I was so distressed that I had failed to be punctual, which is one of my highest values! Yet several years later, I encountered a situation where I used the roads on which I had been lost to get to another place I needed to go. God was using my failure to prepare me for future success.

I know that doesn't seem very important in the face of life's bigger issues, but doesn't that hold true for a failed relationship or business? God used those failures, which seemed so critical at the time, to prepare you for some future success.

Samson's family didn't understand what was going on and, for that matter, neither did Samson. God was leading Samson, however, positioning him right where God wanted him to be so he could do what the Lord wanted him to do. It may not seem like God is leading you, but He is! When you feel like God isn't there, that's not the time to trust less, but more. Put your hope in the God of your purpose and move on. Have faith in God, even in the midst of a seeming failure.

2. **Don't ignore or run from your past; face it.**

"Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her. Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass. In it was a swarm of bees and some honey, which he scooped out with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass" (Judges 14:5-9).

I would argue that your most significant and life-giving testimonies, for you and others, are not the great successes you've had but your greatest failures and how God helped you recover from them. Like Samson, you may have wrestled some lions such as loneliness, bankruptcy, broken relationships and unemployment. Even if you are young, you already have some testimonies of lions that came to destroy you, only to see you rise up in the power of God to be victorious.

When Samson returned to that lion, it brought forth something sweet, even though it was "dead," which fed both Samson and his parents. What is in your past that you thought was dead? Is it a failure, or something you enjoyed doing but don't do anymore. Or is it a significant victory that you don't talk about anymore? Perhaps it's time to revisit that and see if there is something sweet there. In faith, go back over the lessons you learned and see if they can help you or someone else today. Use those failure lessons to write a book or screenplay, counsel others or to simply be encouraged as you face today's trials. As you faithfully face your victories in the midst of failures, God will help you bring forth something sweet.

3. **When you fail, it's not time to run from God but to God.**

While they were in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them. When they stood him among the pillars, Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them." Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. Then Samson prayed to the Lord, "O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived (Judges 16:25-30).

Earlier in this chapter is a significant verse, "However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off" (Judges 16:22 NAS). Even though Samson failed, the source of his

strength (his hair) began to return as he once again refocused on his commitment to God's purpose for his life. At this point in the story, however, Samson was a miserable failure, or so it seemed. He was defeated, blinded and forced to entertain his enemies. Yet he prayed and God heard him, and Samson literally brought the house down at his last performance!

You have to admire Samson's faith. If failure disqualifies someone, then what was Samson doing praying? What right did he have to ask God for another chance? And why did God hear his prayer? God heard Samson's prayer because Samson had faith. Samson was a faithful failure and God didn't seem to mind.

We too must overcome our tendency to run from God when we fail. We inherited that trait from Adam and Eve, who hid from God in the Garden after they failed (see Genesis 3:8). In faith, we must overcome the tendency of running from God and substitute it with a habit of running to God. We can approach God boldly, just like Samson did, even when we fail:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).

So what about you? What lessons can you learn from Samson's failures? How can you apply them to your current situation? Is it time to trust God even though it seems like nothing is happening in your life? Is it time to reevaluate your past through the eyes of faith and see if there is anything that can yield something useful for Him and others? Have you given up, feeling like it's too late to be a productive person of purpose because you have failed so often?

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," then take out a piece of paper or your journal and start writing. Put down your thoughts as you study Samson's life. Then look at the lessons from other faithful failures like Moses, David and Peter. Use their profiles to map out a faith path to recovery, turning your failures into wonderful learning lessons for you and others. If Samson made it, so can you, but only if you don't allow your failures to derail you. Having faith in God will keep you on the right path and will help make you into a faith-full failure, just like Samson.