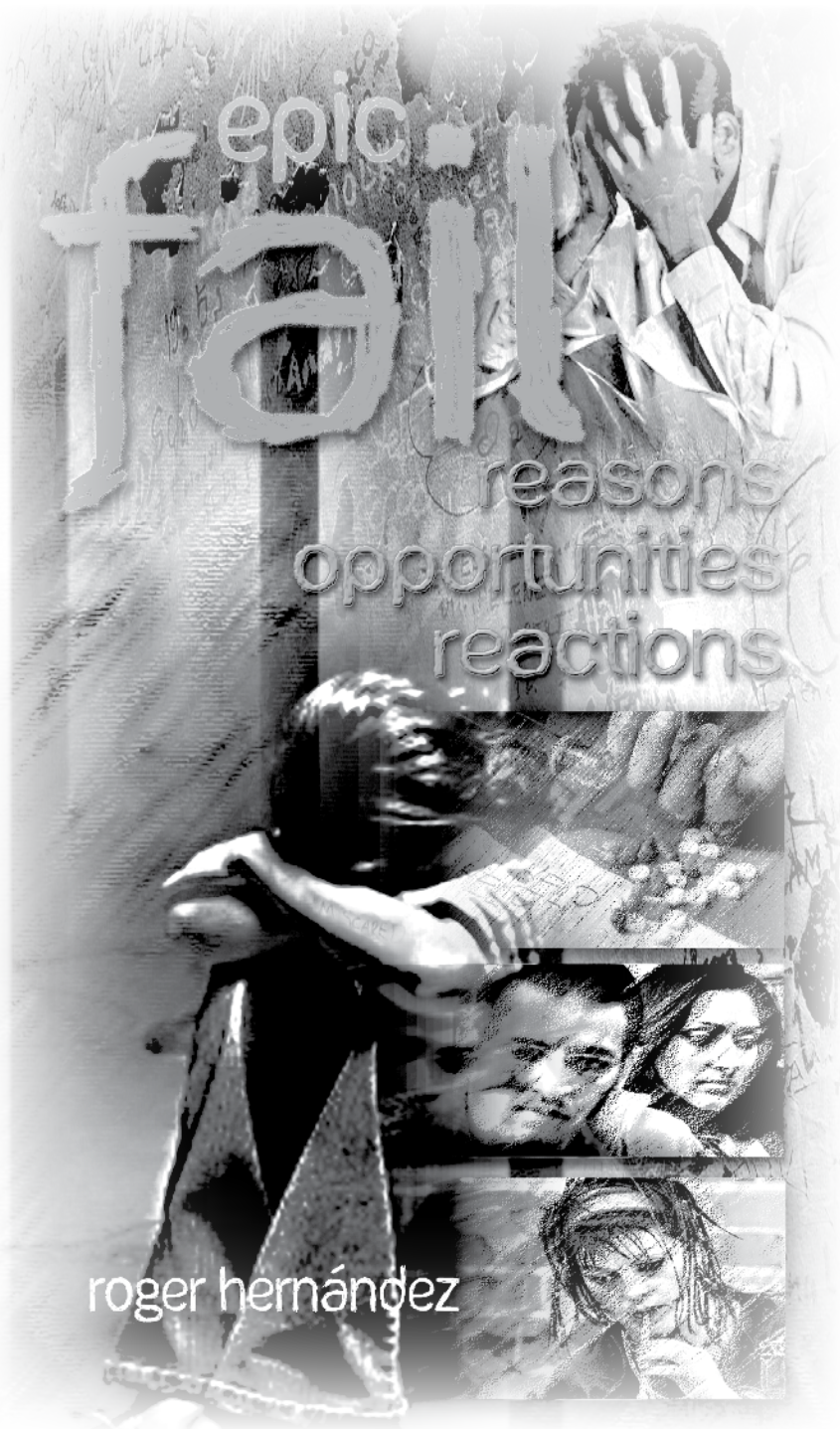


epic fail

reasons
opportunities
reactions

roger hernández



reasons
opportunities
reactions

epic
fail

epicFail

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dedication

To my wife Kathy:

you have been there in my greatest
failures and my most pleasing successes.

To my friends Kendall, Walters, and Jose:

large distances separate us,
but you are never far.

To my Savior and Lord Jesus Christ:

You turned it around.

introduction

Everyone loves a winner. We name our daughters *Victoria* and our sons *Victor*. I can't recall ever being introduced by a parent to children named *Loser Smith* and *Defeated Martinez*. When the team that we like to follow wins, we declare boldly, "*We won*," even though we had no active part on the field of play. A cursory search of the Web about sports teams shows that many more fans follow the Cowboys, Yankees, and Lakers than the Bucs, Pirates, and the Blazers. Why? The former have a track history of winning. Love them or hate them, winners are more popular.

Although we have this fascination with and desire for success, the reality is that we have failed many more times than we care to admit or even remember.

- Failed marriages and business ventures
- Failed attempts to complete an education
- Poor choices that have left some in failing health
- Less than desirable results in the relationship with children or parents
- After the latest break-up, not being sure you will ever get married.

For some, a career choice is not panning out. Perhaps you're a pastor in a declining church. Maybe a downturn in the economy tanked your investments. An idea that looked great when first conceived has not worked. Whatever field you are in, you will at some time or other experience failure.

The question becomes, what can I do when I experience failure? You probably fall into one of the three groups of people who are reading this book:

- Some are about to enter into a season of failure. They can see it coming. This book may be able to prevent or shorten it.
- Some are smack-dab in the middle of a failure. The principles contained in these pages can shed some light on the situation and teach valuable lessons while showing a way to recover.
- Some are on the other side. Failure is in the rear-view mirror, and you are on the road to a better situation.

My desire is that you stay on that road for as long as you can!

This book is divided into three parts:

1. Why?

2. What?

3. How?

We will examine why we fail. Then we will take a look at what lessons we can learn from failure. To conclude, we will study how we react to failure.

Let's get started . . .

~ part one ~

why?

understanding
the reasons we fail.



reasons for failure

Chuck Swindoll tells a story about *Chippy*. *Chippy* was a happy bird that lived with his owner. He loved to sing from his cage. He was well fed and his owner took good care of him. Life was grand. Then one day, it all went awry. The owner wanted to clean *Chippy's* cage, so she turned on the vacuum cleaner, and after connecting the extension hose, proceeded to vacuum the bottom of *Chippy's* cage. At that moment the phone rang. The owner tried to do two things at the same time. With her left hand she continued to vacuum the cage, and with her right hand she answered the phone. She got distracted, and before she knew it she had vacuumed up *Chippy*. Immediately she opened the bag and found *Chippy*, stunned but alive and covered with dust.

Horried at what she had done, she grabbed *Chippy* and put him under the shower head, turning on the water full blast. Realizing that the cure was worse than the problem, she grabbed him and put him on the bathroom counter. She turned the hairdryer on high and pointed it at him to dry him off. *Chippy* survived, barely. Someone asked the owner about *Chippy* some time later, and the owner said, "*Chippy* doesn't sing much anymore."

We all fail. We have all had one of those days when nothing goes as planned. Have you ever felt like *Chippy*? I know I have.

When failure comes, one important question we should ask ourselves is why. Most of the time we can discover the answer to that question. The Bible mentions several reasons why people fail. Let's look at three of them.

Reason #1:

disconnecting

Ezra 9:10

*“And now, O our God,
what can we say after all of this?
For once again we
have abandoned your commands!”*

The first reason the Bible gives for failure is disconnecting from God.

Before we continue, however, we must make one thing clear. Our salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, period. We don't deserve it, can't earn it, and will never be good enough to merit it.

That being said, there are many biblical examples of the connection between obedience and blessing, as well as the connection of willful disobedience and failure. Not every person who disconnects from God will experience failure immediately, but most people who experience constant, sustained failure have disconnected from God at some point in their lives.

Maybe now your life isn't so great. Perhaps, neither Plan A, B, or C has panned out. In fact, you've run out of letters in the alphabet and have started to use numbers. Maybe everything you touch seems to turn into dust, not gold. Crisis is your middle name, and drama, issues, and problems are your constant companions. If you are experiencing failure right now, I invite you to examine your relationship with God first. The farther away from God that you are, the closer you are to failure.

The Bible mentions several benefits of a strong spiritual connection with God. These benefits contribute to our well-being, and their absence can make our lives less than ideal. Here are three.

1. Guidance. *Second Chronicles 26:5* says, "Uzziah sought God during the days of Zechariah, who taught him to fear God. And as long as the king sought guidance from the Lord, God gave him success."

Human beings are often affected by their past and worried about their future, which disturbs their present. God is different. He erases our yesterdays, is in charge of our tomorrows, and brings peace to our todays, because He is guiding us. Having a supernatural GPS is not only important, it is necessary for success.

2. Support. *Job 4:4* tells us, "Your words have supported those who were falling; you encouraged those with shaky knees."

Sometimes, things get so rough that you just need

someone to say, *“Everything will be OK.”* One of my favorite books in the Bible is the book of *Psalms*. I can’t count the times that I have gone to that section of the Bible and read a psalm that’s had a physically and emotionally positive effect on me. God’s Word does in fact support, encourage, and sustain us through hard times.

You will encounter three types of people when you are going through tough times:

- **Ones** who can help you but choose not to.
- **Ones** who can’t help you but would like to.
- **Ones** who can help you and want to.
- **Only** God fits in the third category every time.

3. Perspective. *Job 23:14* says, *“So he will do to me whatever he has planned. He controls my destiny.”*

One of the most basic, yet often forgotten truths of Scripture is that God is God and I am not. As I read the Bible I am reminded of that fact, and it makes all the difference in the world. Our perspective is often skewed by our sinfulness and our myopic understanding of the grand scheme of things. God continually reminds us that He has a plan, His plan is better than ours, and His plan will succeed at the end. As you go through difficult situations, following God’s principles will help you catch a glimpse of the bigger picture. Remember,

- Just because you don’t feel Him, doesn’t mean He is not real.

- Just because you don't see Him work, doesn't mean He isn't working for you.
- Just because you don't agree with His plan, doesn't mean it's not the right one.

A couple was driving down a country road on a crisp autumn afternoon. It was the 1970s, when many cars had wide, unobstructed bench seats. The wife looked at her husband from the passenger side and said to him, "Honey I feel that we have grown apart. I remember when we were dating, even newlyweds, we used to ride in this same car very close to each other. Now look at us. You're on one side and I'm way on the other. What happened to us?" The husband, without missing a beat, said, "if you feel we have grown apart, ask yourself, who moved?"

If you feel that the distance between you and God has increased, ask yourself, who moved?

Reason #2:

shortcuts

Proverbs 21:5

*"Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity,
but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty."*

The second reason why people fail is that they take shortcuts. Shortcuts are a method people use to try to accomplish more tasks in less time. But there are some

things in life that we can't rush. Patience is not like fast food; it is more like Thanksgiving dinner (*unless you have fast food for Thanksgiving, and in which case, skip this section!*).

I am an impatient person by nature. Can you relate? I despise waiting in line, I hate the three-day waiting period, and being stuck in traffic elevates my stress levels. The temptation for people like me, and I suppose many others, is to take shortcuts to accomplish our goals. I want things to move faster, people to change quicker, problems to be resolved in an instant.

Inventors are coming up constantly with new contraptions to make our life easier. Awhile back I read a study done decades ago, which projected that in the 1980s, people would work fewer hours, have more free time, and have an easier life because of all the coming time-saving inventions. The exact opposite has happened! Even with all our advances, we are still looking for less complicated lives but find disappointment instead.

There is a direct connection between impatience and taking shortcuts, for taking shortcuts is the external manifestation of an internal reality. A biblical principle that has helped me deal with my impatience is this:

**You can't do much to accelerate God's blessing,
but you can do a lot to delay it.**

The Bible speaks about "*the appointed time*" and "*a*

time and a season for everything.” Timing is everything as we deal with spiritual issues. One of the clearest examples of this principle is the journey that the people of Israel took from Egypt to the Promised Land. A reading of the last chapters of *Genesis* as well as the book of *Exodus* will show the danger of impatience. A journey that should have taken days took decades. Why? Impatience and a bad attitude. Every time the Israelites said, “We don’t like our leaders,” God said, “One more time around the desert.” Every time they complained about the water, the food, or anything else, God said, “One more time.” The truth is that one of the fastest ways to delay your blessing is a bad attitude. It makes us say things like. . .

- **Why** couldn’t I have married her/him?
- **Why** won’t God bless me?
- **Why** don’t my kids behave like those children?
- **How** come he’s in that position and I am not?
- **Why** did she get married and I’m still single? I mean God, have you seen her?

You know how God responds? “One more time . . .” If your life seems to be stuck in the desert, and you are moving but not really going anywhere, one of the first things to check would be your attitude. If your attitude is one of impatience, a correction needs to be made immediately. Don’t get me wrong. There are times when we must act decisively, when we must go forward in Jesus’ name. But a lot of damage has been done because. . .

- **we moved** ahead without godly consensus
- **we left** before it was time
- **we started** a project without God's blessing.

Don't confuse activity with progress. We confuse movement with advance, action with success, and program implementation with personal growth. The question is not whether we have things going on, but if God is leading.

In my twenty years as a minister, I have seen people fail in three areas because of impatience and shortcuts:

1. Relationships. Loneliness can mess with your mind. I understand it's tough to see all your friends getting married while you are still single. But rushing into a relationship can be devastating. If you feel lonely, get a dog. Don't rush into love.

2. Finances. There is no such thing as a get-rich-quick strategy. In fact, a study of lottery winners demonstrated that many were left without a penny only a short time after winning millions. Trying to invest in pyramid schemes, or lacking research before beginning a financial venture, can leave you penniless and distraught.

3. Moving. Later on I'll go into more detail about the desire that some have to leave a situation every time things get a little rough. For now, let me just say that the temptation to flee is a real one, especially when things aren't going so great. Be careful that you are not running from what seems like an external situation, when

in fact the problem might be internal. No matter where you run, an internal problem will follow you there.

Only God's power can sustain you for the long haul, so be patient.

Underneath impatience lies a desire for control. The reason we take shortcuts and end up failing is that we think we know best. The truth is, we don't. Relinquish everything to God.

In your life there are things that

- **you will never change**—leave those alone.
- **will change slowly**—have patience.
- **need changing now**—have courage.

The key is to have the divine gift of discernment, to know which is which.

I like to work around the house. I like to repair, rebuild, restore, demolish, rearrange—you know, your weekend-warrior type of remodeling. There's only one problem. I'm not good at it. If I had to earn a living as a handyman, I would die of hunger. That's the reason I invite my brother-in-law to come work with me in my "*projects*." After all, I introduced him to his wife, so he owes me. He is really good at remodeling. You could say he was born with a hammer in his hand and probably remodeled his own crib. He is very detail oriented (I'm not), likes to take his time (I don't), and doesn't take shortcuts (I do). One of my favorite expressions I say to try and get him to work faster is "You can't see that detail from a helicopter." He just ignores me and

continues to work. When it's all done and I look at the finished product, I'm glad we took our time. A couple of times, however, we've done it my way, and some sections of my house are a constant reminder of the fallacy of shortcuts. In life, as in construction, it's better to measure twice and cut once.

Reason #3:

pride

Proverbs 29:23

*“Pride ends in humiliation,
while humility brings honor.”*

The three most dangerous words in the English language are “I already know.” I have a teenage son who learned those words early, probably from his mother (or me, but who's keeping track, right?). He loves to tell me how well he can fix, do, complete, and perform any task known to man. I try to be patient with him, because I remember that I was the same way at that age, and because I love him dearly. But to be totally honest, it's hard!

The third reason why people find themselves in the midst of failure is their pride. There is nothing wrong with being a confident person. In fact, a truly confident person will be smart enough to recognize that he doesn't know it all, can't do it all, and needs the help of

God and other people to be successful. Being teachable and admitting our mistakes is not a sign of weakness but of true strength. Pride leads to failure in the following ways:

1. Hard to live with. No one likes a know-it-all. I don't even think that type of person likes himself! The greater the pride, the harder it is for others to relate to him. Pride damages relationships with others like this:

- **It makes you** act superior, alienating others.
- **It makes you** incapable of admitting wrongs, frustrating others.
- **It makes you** a person who does not listen well, distancing others.

Pride is rooted in a distorted view of self. Some people with a low self-image try to overcompensate by acting in prideful ways. This only serves to distance them from others, especially from loved ones. One of the things I counsel parents to do is admit to their kids when they have made a mistake. Contrary to popular belief, that admission strengthens your bond; it does not make you weaker. The apostle *Paul* had it right when he wrote in **Romans 12:16**, *"Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!"*

2. Harder to be blessed. One of the fastest ways of stopping your life's momentum is to believe your own press clippings. The temptation to take some of God's glory for yourself, even if it is disguised in pious state-

ments, will carry grave consequences. God will not share His glory with us. If you sense that momentum has slowed down or stopped in your life, one of the first questions I would ask is the following: Is God getting all the glory? One of the texts that brings out this powerful truth is *James 4:6*. “He gives us . . . more grace to stand against such evil desires. As the Scriptures say, ‘*God opposes the proud but favors the humble.*’ ”

Sometimes I have heard people blame the devil for their lack of personal growth and success, when in fact it could be God who is slowing them down. Maybe it’s just me, but with all the opposition we can face these days, do we need to add God to that list? I think not.

3. Hardest to follow. You may be a leader. An effective leader admits he does not know everything. Followers want to feel that they are contributing to the overall well-being of the company / organization. A prideful attitude alienates followers and fosters discontent and turnover. Healthy leaders have the ability to recognize that they don’t know it all, and they surround themselves with people who can make up for those deficiencies.

Admitting your weakness makes your leadership stronger. “Never let them see you sweat” is a good slogan for a deodorant but not for a leader. A leader once said, “*Without wise leadership, a nation falls; there is safety in having many advisers*” (*Proverbs 11:14*).

I’m a sports fanatic. I follow the Cowboys, the Yankees, and any soccer team that is not Argentina. One

of the key questions professional athletes have to ask themselves is, “When should I retire?” Very seldom do you see a professional athlete realize by themselves that the time has come, without the help of being benched or cut from the team. The reason? Pride. It’s very hard to admit that you can’t do it anymore. There’s somebody younger, faster, and better than you. Pride clouds and distorts the true picture of yourself, which is why it’s important to surround yourselves with “no” men, not just “yes men.”

The Bible is clear when speaking about pride. It precedes nothing that is good, and it is a precursor to failure. *Proverbs 16:18* says, “*Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall.*”

Today, listen to God speaking to you and telling you:

- **You have nothing to prove.** Love Me instead.
- **You cannot impress Me.** Worship Me instead.
- **You don’t know.** Trust Me instead.

~ part two ~

what?

understanding
the opportunities and
lessons failure affords us.



opportunities from failure

One of my favorite examples of a person who learned from their failures is *Thomas Edison*. He's best known for inventing the light bulb, but he did so after many failed tries. Sometimes the filaments were too thick and the light bulb exploded. Other times it was too thin and it wouldn't light up. After each failed experiment, he learned how not to do it, until he finally discovered the perfect combination.

Failure is not final. When we fail it is a great opportunity for us to learn and grow. Failure that we learn from is no longer a failure; it is a lesson learned. The Bible presents three opportunities that are afforded to us through failure.

Opportunity #1:

failure reveals our problems

Proverbs 28:13

*“People who conceal their sins will not prosper,
but if they confess and turn from them,
they will receive mercy.”*

The first opportunity that we have when we fail is to take stock of our life. Failure is a great teacher, although

many times we don't like to take that class. I believe that sometimes we learn more by failure than by success. When we always win, the only thing we learn is to be prideful. Failure is like a bright sticky arrow pasted on a document that says, "Pay attention to this." Even though God is not interested in bringing us unnecessary pain, failure can be used by Him to point out glaring weaknesses and areas of growth in our lives.

I meet with people on a regular basis for pastoral counseling. I see two types of people. The people in one group fail, learn from the failure, and grow. Those in the other group also fail but learn nothing from it and repeat the failure. Here are some real-life examples:

A woman starts a relationship with a man. He proves to be a controlling, even abusive partner. She finds out that he is running around with other women. Frustrated, she ends the relationship, sometimes not soon enough, and changes her Facebook status to "It's complicated." After a while, loneliness strikes, and after a phone call, the two are back together. The cycle of dysfunction, of breaking up and making up, goes on and on. Sometimes it goes even further: the woman gets into a different relationship with a different man but with the same results. While it is important not to blame the victim here, doesn't it make sense after three failed relationships with the same characteristics to take a good hard look at oneself and ask the difficult questions:

- **Why am I** so attracted to less-than-ideal men?
- **What is it about me** that attracts them?
- **What changes in my** character are necessary to have better relationships?

A man gets a job. It's not his ideal job, but it pays the bills, of which he has many. Since he does not like his job or his boss, he puts very little effort into the work. His lack of teamwork and support is noticed by his superiors. He is given a written notice of a less-than-stellar performance review, which he ignores or dismisses.

Several weeks later, another notice comes, this one with a pink slip attached to it. When asked about his employment status, he tells people close to him that he is "in between jobs" and mumbles something about how bad the economy is and all the good jobs are taken. Before he fills out yet another unemployment application, he should ask himself:

- **Why do I** keep getting fired?
- **What action steps do I** need to take so that this doesn't happen in my next job?
- **What training can I** receive, what materials can I read, what events can I attend that would improve my effectiveness as an employee?

A couple starts attending a new church. They are eager to get involved and immediately get busy. There's just one problem. They are hypersensitive. Any comment that has the slightest hint of criticism or displeasure in it creates an immediate and powerful reaction.

After several blowups, they leave the church in a stampede, but not before letting everyone within earshot know about the church's lack of love and support, and they go on to the next church, where it starts all over again. Before they ask the church clerk for their membership transfer, they should ask themselves the following questions:

- **How's my** spiritual connection with God?
- **Am I clear** on the reason why I serve?
- **Why do I** run away from conflict?

A teenager gets his research paper back from the teacher. Not a lot of work and effort went into it, and the grade reflects that. Later that day, before the paper is seen by his parents, he gives an explanation—the teacher discriminates and shows favoritism toward other students. The parents listen and agree, reinforcing in the student the unfortunate victim mentality that no matter what happens, it's never your fault. Before the next assignment is due, wouldn't it be smart for the teenager to examine his previous performance and ask:

- **Is this discrimination** or lack of effort?
- **Is it favoritism** or shoddy work?
- **Did I give it my all** or was it a last-minute effort?

These cases might seem stereotypical, but they happen in real life. Whenever we are staring at failure face to face, we need to ask ourselves: *Why did I fail?* And then we must learn from it.

Why is it important to learn from our failures? Here are three reasons.

1. Demonstrates our intelligence. *Proverbs 18:15* says, *“Intelligent people are always ready to learn. Their ears are open for knowledge.”*

It may seem strange, but we demonstrate our intelligence by admitting that we are not that smart and don't know it all! Someone has said that the definition of a crazy person is one who repeats the same action time after time, expecting different results. A smart person analyzes his mistakes looking for learning opportunities and, after failing, becomes wiser, having learned from the experience. Nothing exemplifies a smart person better than one who learns the lesson the first time.

2. Impacts our behavior. *Psalms 119:7* tells us, *“As I learn your righteous regulations, I will thank you by living as I should!”*

Failure is a great teacher. One lesson we learn is that deficiencies in our character impact our behavior. Failure is a great way to find out where your growth areas are, and we all have them. For example, behind most failed relationships are bad decisions that were motivated by character flaws and expressed in less-than-ideal actions. When we learn from failure, we grow, and that helps us to think twice before we make the same mistakes.

3. Brings honor to our lives. Finally, *Proverbs 1:9* teaches us, *“What you learn from them will crown you with grace and be a chain of honor around your neck.”*

How do you describe an honorable person? According to this particular text, that title belongs to someone who is willing to learn from others, including from their mistakes. Instead of an L for Loser in the forehead, he carries an H for Honor around his neck. Some of the people I most admire and honor in my life are the ones who are willing to admit when they have failed. I also seem to lose some respect for leaders who hide, excuse, or minimize their deficiencies or mistakes. Do you want to become a person of honor? Admit, understand, learn, and move on!

This might come as a surprise to you, but *Thomas Edison* wasn't always considered a genius. In fact he had reason to play the victim card. His fourth grade teacher, at the end of the school year, did not promote him to the fifth grade. Instead she held him back and said about the young lad, "*Thomas* is dumb and cannot learn." Isn't it interesting how failure can motivate some people to achieve greatness, while in others it's an excuse for mediocrity? The decision is up to you. Remember, just because you failed, that doesn't make you a failure.

Opportunity #2:

failure connects you to people

Genesis 2:18

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.’”

We were made for relationships. Every time we fail, it's an opportunity to connect with the person God has designated to help you work through it. God operates through others to bring counsel, support, and help in difficult times. In order to recognize who God is sending your way in the midst of your failure, note the following three principles.

1. Open your eyes. *Psalm 146:8* says, “The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are weighed down. The Lord loves the godly.”

Failure means that a door has closed. When that happens, the temptation is to stare at the closed door and refuse to look at other options. That might be your struggle right now. You might be stuck in the question “why.” Why, God? Why me? Why now? Why this? While self-analyzing is good, it must come to an end after a while, and different options must be looked at. Instead of spending weeks or months staring at the closed door, wishing it could open again, look around and see

who God is sending your way to help you make the transition to a new reality. You have heard it said, “God never closes a door without opening a window.” That’s true. The fun part is that He will send you someone who can point you in that direction.

When I was in college and single, I was attending a church service where my father was preaching. In mid-sermon, he suddenly stopped. My father proceeded to ask a girl seated in the first row if she had a boyfriend. She said no. He then pointed to me and said that I didn’t have a girlfriend and that maybe we should talk. (*Embarrassing doesn’t even begin to describe it!*)

After the service I went to apologize to the young woman and found myself drawn to this unsuspecting church-dating-game victim. We started going out, and I thought I had found my future wife. Things went well for a while but did not end up well. She broke up with me. As I returned for the next school year, broken hearted and feeling like a failure, I wondered why God had allowed me to go through that experience. My answer came in the form of a beautiful brunette, whom I met the first week of classes, named *Kathy*. She became my best friend and for the last twenty years has been my wife. It’s the best thing that ever happened to me, bar none. I’m glad I stopped gazing at the closed door and started looking at the open window, with the help and support of *Kathy*.

You might be going through a similar situation right now in your career, ministry, finances, relationships,

or personal projects. I suggest you open your eyes and look out of the window. It's nice outside.

2. Share your failures. Another way of dealing with your failures is sharing them with others. You can do that with three types of people.

Mentors. These are wise people whom you can listen to. They have probably gone through similar experiences to yours and can point out some specific ways you can deal with your present uncomfortable situation. Good mentors are hard to find, and they are not the same as opinion givers. There are millions of those. Look for effective mentors. They usually reserve their advice for people who are really concerned about listening and developing an action plan and not just griping about how unfair life is. The operating word here is listening. If you do this, you will always find great teachers. **Proverbs 12:26** says, *"The godly give good advice to their friends; the wicked lead them astray."*

Friends. These are caring people you can lean on. They might not have all the answers, but just the fact that you know that they are there for you makes a huge difference. Their purpose is like a steam valve, a point of release for frustration or pain because of the situation. A great friend will tell you the truth but knows when to tell you. They are not "yes men," but at the same time, they seldom use the phrase, "I told you so." **Proverbs 17:17** tells us, *"A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need."*

Students. These are the less-experienced people who can learn from you. Every experience you have had is a lesson that can be shared to encourage, inspire, or warn others. Remember, your responsibility is to share, but you should stay away from trying to use what happened to you to control others. In the desire to help others not make the same mistakes, we can sometimes come across as controlling or overbearing, especially when dealing with people we love, like our children. God loves us, warns us, and shares with us His guiding principles, but He gives us free will. Extend the same courtesy to others. *“I will search for faithful people to be my companions” (Psalm 101:6).*

Opportunity #3:

failure helps you to understand
and claim god's promises

Think about this. Promises exist because failure exists. A promise is God's response to man's problems. If there weren't any needs, there wouldn't be a reason for a promise. Let me give you some examples.

Character	Failure	Promise	Result
Hannah	Unable to have children	1 Samuel 1:17: " 'In that case,' Eli said, 'go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him.' "	A child was born soon after.
People of Israel	Slaves in Egypt	Exodus 3:9–10: " 'Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt.' "	The people were liberated from slavery.
The human race	Sin entered	Isaiah 9:6–7: "For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."	Jesus was born and humanity rescued from sin.

These examples are three among many in the Bible. A careful analysis of Scripture shows this pattern again and again:

- **Problem:** a difficulty presents itself, bringing a problem.
- **Promise:** a specific promise is claimed in faith through prayer.
- **Provision:** one leaves it up to God to bring provision in His time.

Why are God's promises so important? Here are three biblical principles concerning the importance of promises:

1. You have to know the purpose of God's promises.

Some believe that the purpose of God's promises is only to make you happy. The promises of God are not designed to take away problems necessarily, but to help you deal effectively with them. The promises don't always make storms disappear, but they can always help you travel in turbulent waters. They don't always guarantee to take away evil, but they show that good will triumph. God wants to go further than just making you happy—*He wants to save your soul.*

2. You have to know that the timing makes a difference. My job is to know and claim His promises. His job is to listen and act, in His time, according to His plan. Some people want to use the Bible as a magic wand, or they think God is a celestial waiter who is just waiting for your order, so that He can supply your wants.

Abraham had to wait twenty-five years for the son who was promised. Israel had to wait four hundred years for freedom. Humanity had to wait four thousand years for the Savior to be born. All were promises of God. All came through. All required patience.

3. You have to know the promise before you can claim it. Since there is a promise in the Bible for each of my specific needs, it would behoove me to try and find out what those promises are, don't you think? We can't claim a promise we don't even know exists. I respectfully suggest that for a moment you stop listening to what other people are saying about your situation and search the Word of God to see what His thoughts are about what you are going through.

Blas Rubio was one of my most memorable church members. He was past sixty years old when I met him. He had been a Christian for only eight years. The life he led before being baptized had been a hard one because he was an alcoholic. His hardcore drinking had taken its toll. By the time we first met, he was going to dialysis three times a week and waiting for a suitable match for a kidney transplant. He was waiting and praying, claiming God's promises for healing.

More than sixty dialysis patients had started the journey with him. A few years later, only five remained. It was encouraging to see *Blas's* positive attitude, strong faith, and fearless determination as he prayed for a kidney transplant. He took every opportunity to ask for that special prayer request. There were countless anoint-

ing ceremonies, prayer-meeting requests, and altar-call responses. One time another member said to him, “Brother *Blas*, I don’t know why you keep praying for the same thing. Maybe this is the cross God has given you to bear.” *Blas* paid no attention and kept praying.

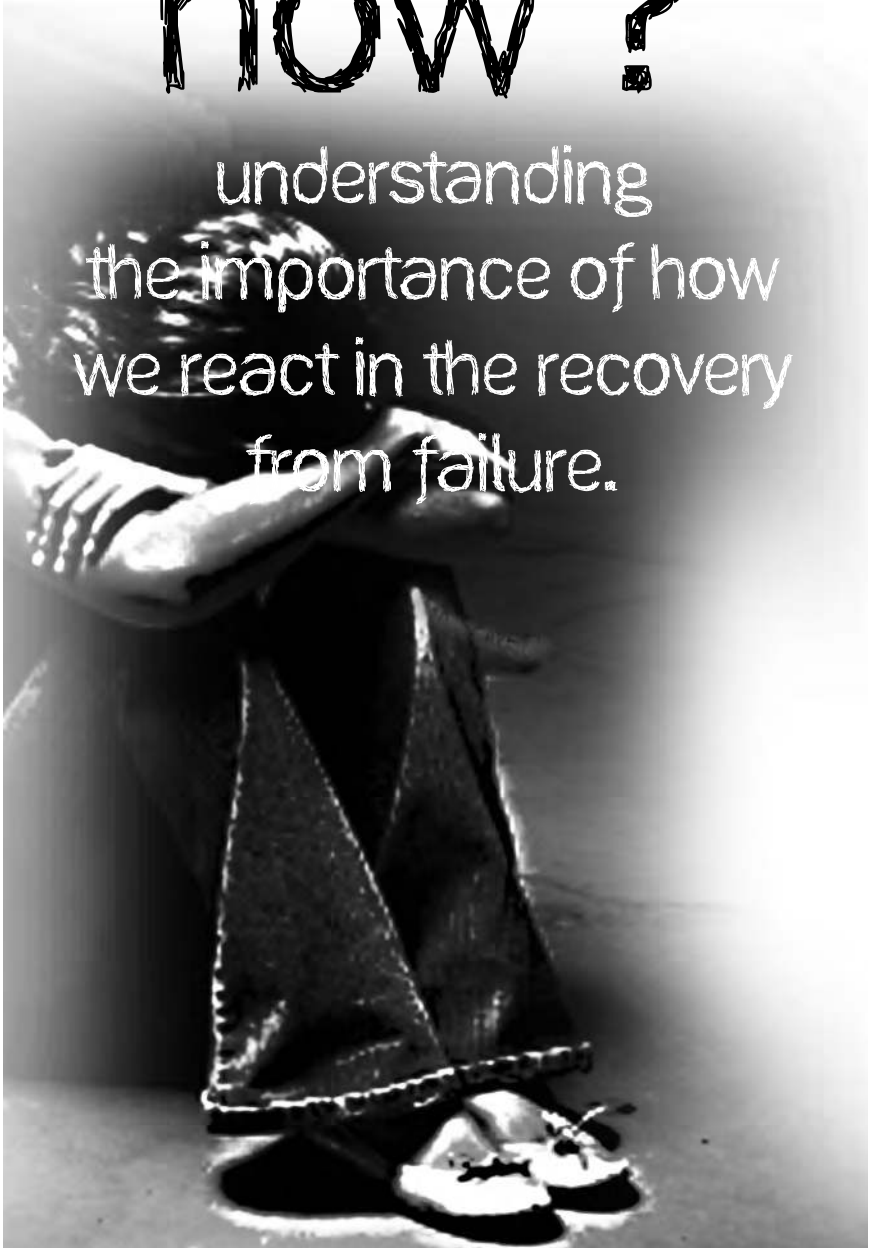
One afternoon at 4:00 p.m. I received a call from the hospital. A highway accident had left a man dead, and he was an organ donor. Would *Blas* be able to come in? By midnight *Blas* had a new kidney. By 9:00 a.m. he was going to the bathroom on his own. Ten years have passed since the transplant. *Blas* is enjoying his health and gives thanks every day to a God who keeps His promises.

King David knew the same God—one who is faithful to His promises. He not only knew them in his mind, but he had experienced them in his own life. He knew that Bible promises are God’s response to human problems. That’s why *David* could say with all assurance, “Your promises have been thoroughly tested; that is why I love them so much” (***Psalms 119:140***).

~ part three ~

how?

understanding
the importance of how
we react in the recovery
from failure.



reactions to failure

On my daughter's fifth birthday, she received the usual gifts—some clothes, dolls, a tea-cup set, a last-minute “dollar store” gift from the guy who completely forgot about the party. You know, the usual. Except for one gift. A well-intentioned but completely misguided party guest brought her a fish tank with three fish. Now I love dogs, dislike cats, and don't care much for fish. If you're a parent you can identify with me. When your very young children get a pet, you're usually the one who ends up taking care of it.

Not wanting to be rude by giving the fish back or cruel and flushing them down the toilet, I swallowed hard, put on a fake smile, and put the fish tank in my bedroom. By the end of the week, two of the fish were dead. But honestly, I didn't kill them.

The one remaining fish taught us many lessons. The filter broke, and the fish tank became green with algae, but the fish kept swimming. The light bulb went out, and we fed it on an inconsistent basis, but the fish kept swimming. One day I came home and found a white liquid in the fish tank. After I asked around, my two-year-old son informed me that the fish was hungry so he had given it some of his milk. He also threw in some coins so it could buy some more supplies. But the fish kept swimming.

That little fish won our hearts. So we decided to give it a better home. We cleaned out the fish tank, replaced the light bulb, unclogged the filter, removed the coins, and replaced the water, being careful to pre-treat the water before placing the fish in it. A half hour after we put it back in the tank, the fish was dead.

Why did the fish die? Maybe it was old, maybe it had a heart attack, or maybe it had gotten so used to the muck and the mire that it didn't know how to react to its new environment.

A big part in the process of transforming your failures into victories is the way you react to them. Your reactions to failure reveal your character and reflect the true condition of your spiritual life. In this section we will analyze three reactions to failure.

Reaction #1:

quit

Ecclesiastes 10:4

*“If your boss is angry at you, don't quit!
A quiet spirit can overcome even great mistakes.”*

Usually the first reaction to failure is to quit. Awhile back I was watching a report on CNN about an African-American pastor in New Jersey who works with inner-city children. His goal is to encourage and provide opportunities for higher education to as many young

people in his community as possible. Although his desire is a praiseworthy one, sometimes his results frustrate him. Reporter *Soledad O'Brien* asked him a very insightful question.

“How often do you think about quitting?”

He answered in two words: “Every day.” He said he felt like quitting at least once daily, but he would wake up the next morning and remember his purpose, and he would decide to give it his best shot all over again. The frustration and pain of failure can do that to you.

Failure causes pain, and since most of us don't like pain, an easy solution is to get away as fast as possible from the person or situation that is causing that pain. It may seem easier, but is it the right approach?

It's easier to quit on a bad marriage than to work through the issues.

- **It's easier to quit** a job with a difficult boss than to have an uncomfortable but necessary conversation.
- **It's easier to stop** attending a church where you had a bad experience than to resolve the problem.
- **It's easier to give up** on God when life doesn't turn out as you planned than to wait patiently on the Lord.

I believe this “quit first” attitude is endemic in our society. We watch shows on TV that supposedly resolve major issues in thirty minutes. The new normal is the mistaken perception that you can have all of the pleasure without any of the consequences, all of the good with none of the bad, and all of the success with none of

the work. The great football coach *Vince Lombardi* said that the only place success comes before work is in the dictionary. But no one wants to wait for delayed gratification anymore. It's a "make me happy now, or I walk" type of attitude.

The common response nowadays is that when the going gets rough, the tough get going as far away from the rough as possible!

I want you to consider three areas in which people give up:

1. We give up on God. The reason we give up on God, I believe, stems from an incorrect understanding of His divine purpose for our life. Some think that God's main objective is to make us happy. When that doesn't happen, they think, Why bother? I mean, what good is God if He is not being good to me by allowing hard times to happen? A biblical principle that helped me deal with the age-old question of why a good God allows pain to exist is this:

God's main objective on this earth is not to make you happy but to save you.

Let that truth sink in for a moment. If you believe that's God primary purpose is for you to be happy, then when bad things happen to you, you might question God's plan or, even worse, His existence. On the other hand, if you believe that God's primary desire is to save you, then everything that happens, good or bad, fits

into His divine purpose for your life. This creates hope instead of despair and brings meaning instead of apathy. You will always have some questions as to why things happen, but expecting trouble helps you deal with it more effectively. Every time pain shows up in your life, you are confronted with two choices: run to or away from God. Which direction are you running these days?

2. We give up on relationships. Relationships are messy. Relationships have their great days, but they also have their rainy, depressing, run-of-the-mill days as well. We have to manage egos, deal with childlike attitudes, have difficult conversations with sensitive people—and that's just your husband. The truth is that sometimes, you and your kin can't!

A long time ago I learned a short poem that goes like this:

Living in heaven, with saints we don't know, that would be glory.

Living on earth, with saints we know, well, that's another story.

Relationships are messy. People don't always come through or stay faithful or truthful. Life would be awesome if it weren't for the people! But we were created for relationships. The devil is afraid of relationships. Notice that in the Garden of Eden, he didn't show up until there were two people, and he didn't attack both, but only one of them. He knows that "a string of three strands doesn't break very easily." He knows that "one can win one thousand, but two will win ten thousand."

The reason the devil fights positive relationships in your life is that he understands the incredible power for good that they have. Who are you connecting with these days?

3. We give up on our dreams. People have dreams, objectives, aspirations, and goals. God made us with a specific purpose. Our job is to discover and develop that purpose. What do you do when confronted by obstacles? How easily do you give up on your God-given dreams? Maybe you have dreamt of starting a business, going back to school, changing careers, going into full-time ministry, looking for a compatible mate, or you've had some other dream. At some point, you encountered resistance. As any bodybuilder can tell you, you need resistance to build muscle. You can't build strong muscles with one-pound weights. Have you given up? I encourage you not to quit now. What dream have you given up on?

Walt was a reporter for a newspaper in Kansas City. One day he was called into the manager's office and was fired. The reason given for his dismissal was "lack of creativity." *Walt* left to follow his dream. Even though many obstacles presented themselves, he never quit. He later became so wealthy that he purchased the newspaper company that had fired him. (Can you imagine how that encounter must have played out. Can you say, "Awkward"?) *Walt Disney* is a household name today. The reason? He never quit. Neither should you. Join

me in repeating the words that Jesus cried out to his Father in the moment when the pain seemed almost unbearable. These words might do you good on a day like today:

He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, *“My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine”* (**Matthew 26:39**).

Reaction #2:

blame

Genesis 16:5

“Then Sarai said to Abram, ‘This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she’s pregnant she treats me with contempt. The Lord will show who’s wrong—you or me!’ ”

This verse always makes me chuckle. Let’s take a quick look at the story. *Abram* was married to *Sarai*. They had no kids. He was old, and she was sterile. Since there were no blue pills or artificial insemination back then, they were pretty much stuck with their situation. That was until God showed up. He promised them a child, and not only that, but He told the surprised couple that their descendants would be so numerous, they would be like stars in the sky or the sand of the sea.

But between the promise and the provision comes that testing time better known as patience. Twenty-five years' worth of it, in fact. *Sarai* started getting restless and concluded that God needed some help (always a bad idea).

She told *Abram* her plan. *"Abram, dear, put on your hearing aids and come here. Listen to me for a while. I have a plan. I want you to go and sleep with my servant (a younger, better-looking version of me). You will get her pregnant, and that baby will be the promised one."*

Abram looked at *Sarai* and said, "You know, this is something very difficult that you are asking me, but I am willing to do it. Not because I want to, but because I love you and you asked me to. I'll go ahead and sacrifice and take one for the team." So he put on some Old Spice, put on his best desert outfit, and nine months later, there was a child. Things didn't turn out as planned, however. They seldom do when we try to help God out. That brings us to our text:

"Then Sarai said to Abram, 'This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she's pregnant she treats me with contempt. The Lord will show who's wrong — you or me!'"

Notice *Sarai's* attitude. Instead of accepting and owning her mistake, she transfers all blame to *Abram*. That same mentality prevails in our culture today. "It's not my fault. It must be someone else's. Poor me, I'm just a victim of circumstances, a wrong-place, wrong-time type of situation." It's much easier to blame others.

- **The reason my** kids are estranged from me was not the dysfunctional, abusive manner I treated them, but that kids have no respect for authority these days.
- **The reason I** left the church is that people didn't love me, the pastor didn't feed me, and the rules got to me, not because I had religion but not a real relationship with God.
- **The reason I** am in bad shape financially is that I don't make enough money, not that I have a compulsion to buy things I don't need, with money I don't have, to impress people I don't even like.

It's easier to blame others for our predicament.

That's why people sue McDonalds for making them overweight. To be fair, there are times when other people cause us pain and suffering. An abusive parent, a sketchy business partner, an unfaithful spouse are but a few examples of real pain caused by people other than yourself. That might well be your case, and we don't want real victims to assume that they are responsible for damage inflicted on them by others. That being said, there are many instances of lives derailed by self-inflicted wounds.

The actions you must take that are important for you to take ownership of your life, including your failures, instead of blaming other people are listed as follows:

1. Demonstrate true repentance. This has great impact on your relationship with God. A major step in restoring and growing in your relationship with God is

recognizing the basic fact that you are not flawless. In the Old Testament, a specific requirement before a relationship with God could be restored was admission of guilt. *Leviticus 5:3* says it this way: “When you realize what you have done, you must admit your guilt.”

In any area in life, a great first step to fixing a problem is to admit there is a problem to fix. We have one big problem. That problem is called sin, which means walking away from God. When we repent, we turn around and start walking with Him.

2. Demonstrate maturity. This enhances your character development. A mature person understands that while you may not be able to control what happens to you, you more often than not can control how you react to it. Blame is seldom an appropriate first response to a crisis or a problem. A mature person doesn't concentrate on spending a lot of time trying to find out who caused the problem, but rather taking the necessary steps to correct the problem. Another way of saying it is this:

- **People in denial** ignore the problem.
- **Unhealthy people** complicate the problem.
- **Childish people** blame others for their problem.
- **Mature people** find a solution to the problem.

3. Demonstrate humility. That improves your relationship with others. It makes you approachable; in other words, it makes you human. We have spoken at length about the importance of admitting our faults, so

we won't repeat that here. Suffice to say that when we resist the urge to pass the buck, it strengthens the leadership of our lives and fosters a climate of openness and grace.

A number of Bible characters demonstrated what to do and not to do in the humility department. One was *Nehemiah*. Even though he was far away from his people and did not himself participate in the people's willful disobedience, he identified with them when he prayed:

"Then I said, 'O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love with those who love him and obey his commands, listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses'" (Nehemiah 1:5-7).

On the opposite side of the spectrum was *Saul*. A weak leader, he loved to justify himself, rationalize his actions, and pass blame to others. When confronted by the prophet *Samuel* after willfully disregarding a divine command, he said, *"'Yes, I have sinned. I have disobeyed your instructions and the Lord's command, for I was afraid of the people and did what they demanded'" (1 Samuel 15:24).*

In almost two decades of ministry, I've had in front of me literally hundreds of couples for counseling. I don't recall many times when the husband looked at me and said, "You know, pastor, I am the problem here.

I am making a mess in our relationship. I need to love more, hurt less, and learn to forgive always. I need to put down the remote and take my wife out on a date. If you want to know who the problem is, you are looking at it. It's me!" Instead, most couples blame their spouse, Hollywood, popular culture, the fact that they were not breastfed as a baby, their parents, their in-laws, Steven Seagal—anything but themselves. The truth is, we can only change and control ourselves, so let's start there. Leave the rest up to God.

Who are you blaming for your life these days? Maybe the person responsible for at least some of the mess you're in is staring back at you from the mirror. As the old, old song your parents used to sing goes:

It's me, it's me, it's me oh Lord, standing in the need or prayer. Not my teacher, not my preacher, But it's me oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

Reaction #3:

rebel

1 Samuel 15:23

"Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols."

The third way some react to failure is to rebel against God. I define rebellion as a lifestyle of willful, constant disobedience to biblical principles and values. It's like Reaction #2 on steroids. I explain it this way.

Imagine you are traveling in a caravan of wagons through the African jungle. Life is not perfect, but there is strength in numbers, especially with the man-eating lions that abound in the landscape. When night time falls, the leader explains very clearly the dangers of venturing out at night. You hear him but dismiss his warnings. You are tired of him telling you what to do, when to get up, and where to spend the night.

So you wait until everybody is asleep and go out into the night. Oh, the freedom. No one can tell you what to do now! Suddenly you hear a growl, and two sparkly eyes are staring straight at you. Any other person would run toward camp, but not you—you're smarter than that. You continue your journey into the darkness. You are free, and you will leave all those lemmings behind. You are in charge now. You are the king of the world!

But that feeling is short-lived. You end up hitting some rough patches, and after going around in circles for days, you end up back in camp anyway, bloodied, bruised, and battered, missing some vital body parts, like an arm or both middle fingers. Lesson? Follow the leader. Hang with the others. Stay in camp. It's safer there.

Rebellion is sin. I know that sin is not a very popular word these days, but it is what it is. It's not a dysfunction, a disorder, or a syndrome. It's sin. And it can mess you up real good.

A sinful lifestyle will produce the following results:

1. Sin seldom affects only the rebellious one. One of the most common excuses and justifications for sin goes something like this: “It’s my life. My body. What I do is my business. My personal choice. I’m only hurting myself.” What we fail to recognize is that sin is seldom an individual sport. It’s more like a bomb than a bullet.

2. Sin will make you do things you never thought you would do. Take infidelity as an example. I don’t think anyone gets up one morning and says, “I think I will ruin my life, lose my family, alienate my friends, destroy my reputation, and hurt the people I love the most by being unfaithful today.” Yet it happens—thousands of times every day. Sin is the reason a religious leader is caught with pornography in the church computer. It is the reason a senator loses his job by sending racy pictures of himself to women all over the country. It’s in the drug-addicted prostitute, the financial guru who steals millions in a Ponzi scheme, the alcoholic father who kills his family while driving drunk, the college student who steals and sells the answers to the test questions. Sin wakes up the reckless gene in human beings.

I have had a chance to speak candidly with several married individuals who were unfaithful to their spouse, and every last one had a common theme to their story. They told me, “I never intended this to happen.” Yet it does. They never thought they would “end up like this.” Yet they do. Sin will degrade your character,

delete your ability for discernment, and demolish your moral compass. Sin will take you places you don't want to go. It's not like a bus, where you can ring a bell and get off at the next stop. It's more like a runaway train, and Denzel Washington isn't coming.

I can't count the conversations I've had with people who regret giving in to sin the first time, thinking they were in charge, and now are in a place in their life they never thought they would be. Their addiction, affair, and attraction got out of hand quicker than they could spell disaster. The lesson is, if you don't want to get derailed, stay off that train. Jesus puts it this way (kind of drastic, I know, but hear His point): “ *‘And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell’* ” (**Matthew 5:30**). His point is simple. Do whatever it takes, but stay away from sin. Even self-inflicted pain is preferable to sin-inflicted pain.

3. Sin will make you stay longer than you want to stay. The problem with a sinful lifestyle is not only what it does to you, but the length of time it does it. Talk to anyone with an addiction and you will hear firsthand the frustration and hopelessness that characterize their lives. The journey into the forbidden might have started innocently enough, but somewhere along the way a line was crossed, a step was taken, or a decision made that proves almost impossible to come back from unscarred. Is it possible to recover? Absolutely. Is it going to be a

very difficult and painful process? Probably. That's the bad news. The great news is that if you haven't started down that road, you don't have to. The good news is that even if you are traveling down that path, you can turn around. Listen to the pain in God's voice as He wonders when His children will turn around: *"Then why do these people stay on their self-destructive path? Why do the people of Jerusalem refuse to turn back? They cling tightly to their lies and will not turn around"* (Jeremiah 8:5).

As you have probably noticed by now, I have painted a very bleak picture of the reality of a rebellious lifestyle. The reason I felt I needed to, is that I would like to spare you the pain and suffering which is sure to be your travel companion as you go down that road.

I speak from experience. At seventeen, I decided that the "church thing" wasn't working for me and I needed some freedom. My choices were the complete antithesis of the lessons my parents had taught me as a child. I won't spend time glorifying that rebellious past, but my choices were not the best, to say the least. I am thankful to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for delivering me from that lifestyle, but I still carry some of the scars, both literally and emotionally. I learned the hard way that there is no such thing as consequence-free sin. There is always a price to be paid, and it's usually higher than you ever imagined.

When I was a child, I heard this story in one of my dad's sermons. I have no idea if it happened or not, but it illustrates a great point. One night a man, let's call

him *Joe*, was entering a watering hole to drink his troubles away. As he entered the cantina, another customer inquired concerning his purpose in the establishment. The man said, "I am here to drown all of my sorrows." After a night of drinking, he stumbled by the same customer, who asked for an update.

"Hey, *Joe*, were you able to drink your troubles away?"

"No," says *Joe*, "the little rascals learned how to swim."

Sin promises much but delivers nothing.

One frigid, windy autumn afternoon, my beautiful wife and I were traveling by plane from Michigan to Baltimore. The trip had one stop in Cleveland. The first plane was a sixteen-passenger commuter plane that looked flimsy from the get-go. Anyone living close to the Midwest knows that the winds can pick up pretty good at that time of year. The moment we took off, the problems started. The plane shook violently, the ups and downs doing a number on our stomachs. I started confessing my sins, previous, present and future, because I thought that the end was near. The pilot's door was open, and I saw him take out a manual that I believe said "*For emergencies only!*" Red lights flashed inside his cabin. (*This was before 9/11, and you could actually see who was piloting the plane*). My wife held my hand until my knuckles were as white as my face. This ordeal stopped for a little while once we got above the clouds, but it started again in our descent into Cleveland. Finally, we made it. Scared, upset, uncomfortable, but we made it.

This experience taught me a valuable lesson. When we were in the midst of that situation, thousands of feet in the air, no one rebelled and said, “This is too uncomfortable, I’m leaving!” The reason was that even though it was bad inside, it was worse outside. You are always safer close to God. Stay in the plane. It’s safer there. Remember *Noah*, safe in the ark: “*As the waters rose higher and higher above the ground, the boat floated safely on the surface*” (*Genesis 7:18*).

Reaction #4:

grow

Philippians 3:12–14

“I have not yet reached my goal, and I am not perfect. But Christ has taken hold of me. So I keep on running and struggling to take hold of the prize. My friends, I don’t feel that I have already arrived. But I forget what is behind, and I struggle for what is ahead. I run toward the goal, so that I can win the prize of being called to heaven. This is the prize that God offers because of what Christ Jesus has done.”

Just because you have failed, doesn’t mean you are a failure. Failure can teach you, but it does not have to de-

fine you. A phrase that I have heard or seen in people's lives contains the following word: feel. For example:

- **"I just don't** feel like I can win."
- **"I just don't** know if I can love again."
- **"I don't** feel I can overcome that sin."
- **"I feel** it's impossible."

Feelings are kind of tricky. It's dangerous to live your life based on feelings and not biblical principles. Maybe the following story will illustrate my point.

Before I tell you the next story, I want to let you know that my wife is the most awesome, incredible, absolutely fabulous cook in the world. Or the galaxy and maybe the universe. (You know, she is reading this book too.)

One night, I was coming home late, and hungry. Very hungry. Recently married, I was not expecting my wife to be up, but she was. A feeling of happiness began stirring up inside of me. Maybe she will cook something for me. I did not have to ask. She volunteered to prepare anything I wanted. I asked for fried plantains, beans, and sour cream. (*Don't judge me, I was hungry!*) As she cooked, that loving feeling grew to gargantuan proportions. After what seemed to be an eternity, she came out of the kitchen, a celestial vision like no man had ever seen. Angels were singing the Hallelujah chorus and her hair moved in the wind (the fan was on) as she made her way toward me. My heart was going to explode from all these feelings of appreciation and love.

She gave me the food. I prayed a short prayer, the one hungry people do. Then I proceeded to put the first spoonful of beans in my mouth. You see, there are two recipes for preparing beans. One is beans with a little bit of salt. The second, lesser known one is salt with a little bit of beans. Guess which one my celestial vision used that night? If you guessed option number two, you are correct! I love sugar, but I'm not a fan of salt. The beans were so salty that the Dead Sea took a bite and said, "Wow, that's too much."

I learned a couple of lessons about feelings that night. It was amazing how fast the adoration was replaced by discomfort. All the time it took for the "loving feeling" to disappear was the time it takes a spoonful of beans to travel from the plate to the mouth. Feelings are tricky. If you make decisions based on them, you are treading on dangerous ground. There is, however, a better alternative.

The Bible passage at the beginning of this chapter is one I treasure. *Paul*, no stranger to failure himself, gives us the correct formula for reacting to failure: Move on. A look at that passage will bring out several powerful lessons:

- 1. Paul recognizes** his imperfections but does not let them define, stop, or hinder his progress.

- 2. He understands** that the best way to recover from a failure is not to continue to dwell indefinitely on it, but to learn from it and move on. It's very dangerous to drive a car looking through the rearview mirror, and the same goes for your life.

3. He firmly believes that his best days are ahead of him. Victory is yet to arrive, and he lives with a goal in mind. If you know why you run, you'll stay in the race after most have stopped running.

What kept *Paul* running toward his goal? How can you recover, even thrive, after failing? One word: grace. But where can we find grace? We do not live in a grace-filled world. The world does not offer cheap grace. It offers gratification by works. Think about it. We cannot find grace in these:

Sports. You play well, you get paid. Endorsements, applause, and fans come to the winner. Sports are ruled by works.

Work. You work well, you get the bonus, promotions, accolades, the corner office, and the raise. Work is ruled by works (no pun intended).

School. You put in the work, do well on your tests, you get on the dean's list. Hard workers usually get the scholarships, the summa cum laude, and the parchment paper on the wall that says to everyone, "*I earned this.*" School is ruled by works.

Our world is ruled by works. From the supermarket to the information superhighway, the principle is the same. You get what you work for, sometimes less. It's impossible to buy a car by grace, or a house, or a computer. If you want to go to the mall, get a bite to eat, or get a haircut, come prepared to pay for it. Credit cards supposedly have a "grace period," but it comes with strings attached, usually lasting only thirty days.

The question remains: If we all have failed, and grace is the solution for that failure, where can we find grace? Where is the place where people can experience liberating, transforming, life-changing grace? Once again, one word: *church*.

Church is the place for grace. It's the hope of the world. It's the only place where you can see love for the sinner while he or she is overcoming sin. It's the place people can come just as they are and leave better than they were. Church, with all its imperfections, can be the vehicle that God uses to help His children learn about His grace. I would love to take this opportunity to invite you to church.

- **For some**, it's already a regular experience.
Keep coming.
- **For some**, it's been a while. Come back.
We missed you.
- **For some**, it will be the first time. Start coming.
Don't be afraid.
- **For all**, grace is bigger than your greatest failure.
Come as you are.

"Each time he said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.' So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me"
(2 Corinthians 12:9).

conclusion

I would like to finish the book by sharing with you about David, one of my favorite Bible characters. He fought and defeated a formidable opponent called *Goliath*. I believe that in this story we can find powerful principles to deal with the people and situations that attempt to stop God's plan from being accomplished in our life. Simply said, those people are obstacles between you and your victory. Some of those people are well intentioned but mistaken. Some can be family members. Some are acquaintances who share membership in the same organization but little else.

David had been anointed as the next king but wasn't on the throne yet. The present king, a big guy with a small heart named *Saul*, was in the midst of a confrontation with the nation's fierce enemy, the Philistines. Most know how the story ends, with a great victory of God's people over a mighty enemy that included the giant named *Goliath*. Before that victory, however, *David* had to overcome four obstacles in the form of people, all of whom could have derailed his plans. I suggest to you that if you want to become a prevailing, overcoming, victorious person, you need to be aware of these same types of people.

• **Some would like to limit you. 1 Samuel 17:17-18** says, “Now Jesse said to his son David, ‘Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them.’ ”

The people of Israel were in need of soldiers, not delivery boys. They were in the midst of a war. Did you notice what the father of *David* indicated to him? “The only thing you are good for right now is to take supplies and bring back news.” Even though *David* had been anointed king, his father still considered him an errand boy.

Whenever God calls you in order to use you, His vision may be very clear to you, but it may not be as clear to those around you! In fact, the ones closer to you might be the ones hardest to convince that you should be doing something different than what you are doing.

The tragic part in the story of *David* is that the person who tried to limit him was his own father. A word to parents everywhere: Make sure your children know that you are willing to support them. Help them to dream; teach them to stretch themselves. Remember, where one parent saw an errand boy, God saw a king.

It’s a good thing *David* had the sense to “disobey” his dad. The Bible tells us that he went to the front lines and, instead of limiting himself to making deliveries, he got close to the action. He spoke to people, and he observed and analyzed the situation. Then he acted.

• **Some would like to give you advice** (which they are usually not following themselves). **1 Samuel 17:20:** *“So David left the sheep with another shepherd and set out early the next morning with the gifts, as Jesse had directed him. He arrived at the camp just as the Israelite army was leaving for the battlefield with shouts and battle cries. Soon the Israelite and Philistine forces stood facing each other, army against army. David left his things with the keeper of supplies and hurried out to the ranks to greet his brothers. As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, came out from the Philistine ranks. Then David heard him shout his usual taunt to the army of Israel. As soon as the Israelite army saw him, they began to run away in fright.”*

Did you notice what the people of Israel did every day? The text says they shouted “battle cries.” Can you imagine that scene? They would get up in the morning, adjust their helmets, put on their boots, sharpen their swords, strap on their chest protectors, and line up for battle. Probably a leader with a powerful voice would come, and the shouting would start.

“Who will win the battle?”

“We will!”

“Who fights for *Jehovah*?”

“We do.”

“Who shall plunder the enemy?”

“We shall!”

The only problem is that everybody was shouting, but no one was fighting. When *Goliath* came out, their

words became as empty as your wallet on the Thursday before payday.

You will find some people like that in your life. They have an opinion about everything, and apart from talking, have done very little else as far as implementation goes. God values our words only when they are accompanied with actions. It is easier to speak about the problems than it is to do something about them.

As I have mentioned before, I love sports. I love to play them, watch them, and coach them. Once in a while I get together with some friends to watch a football game of the best team in the universe, the Dallas Cowboys. One of the memorable scenarios that will happen in every game is when one of my friends, usually the somewhat uncoordinated, slightly overweight one who was cut from third-grade flag-football team while in the eighth grade, gets up and screams at the quarterback/coach/defense to do something. He is very confused and/or angry about why the quarterback did not throw to the open receiver or the defensive back failed to make a tackle. I wonder how long my friend would last in the NFL. Probably not long at all. It is one thing to sit comfortably in the lounge chair and pontificate about what players should be doing. It is an entirely different thing to make an accurate pass to the right receiver forty yards down field with a three-hundred-and-fifty-pound beast gunning for your head.

A great quote worth remembering:

It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat (Theodore Roosevelt).

• **Some will judge your motives. 1 Samuel 17:28**
says, "When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, 'Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.' 'Now what have I done?' said David. 'Can't I even speak?' He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before."

If it wasn't one family member, it was another. It makes you wonder about *David's* family. All *David* wants is to get some information about what is going on, and he can't catch a break. His oldest brother, the same one who was passed over when *Samuel* went to

their house to pick a king, is still angry at him and starts making a scene. What does *Eliab* really know about *David's* intentions? How can he know his thoughts? How can anyone know what is in the heart of another person? It's impossible.

Yet we do it all the time. We label people. We assign categories based on race, money, education, family of origin, or church. It is far easier to box people in, to make them fit in these tight little categories, than to get to know them. That way, you don't even have to try to relate to them, because you already know what they are all about.

Eliab belongs to the type of people I like to call "drainers." Some people are natural encouragers, and when you are done talking with them, they leave you feeling better about yourself—uplifted, ready to take on the world. Others, however, have the gift of draining every last ounce of happiness out of your life. Such was *Eliab*. He could not leave well enough alone. He had to make a comment. He had to make a scene. He had to make sure everyone, including *David*, knew that *David* was a nobody, just a shepherd. At a time when soldiers were needed, and rather than affirming the future king, *Eliab* was judging *David's* heart. Small-minded people see others as a threat, not a help.

I love *David's* response to *Eliab*. First he said, "What have I done now," which shows you that they have had this type of encounter before. Then he did what most of us should have done to that family member or friend

who constantly tries to put us down. The Bible says that *David* “turned away to someone else.” People like *Eliab* you just can’t please, no matter how hard you try. Walk away.

Some will try to demand you do it their way. *1 Samuel 17:38* says, “*Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. ‘I cannot go in these,’ he said to Saul, ‘because I am not used to them.’ So he took them off.*”

Saul was well intentioned. He was comfortable in a soldier’s uniform, and he assumed *David* would be too. But he was wrong. *David* and *Saul* were both warriors, but they were very different. Whereas *Saul* liked the sword, *David* felt comfortable with the sling. Instead of a spear, a smooth stone; instead of a helmet, a bag full of rocks. *Saul* didn’t make the mistake of stopping *David*. He just preferred that *David* not start until he had tried it *Saul’s* way.

We see this same attitude in people every day. We see it in families. Husbands try to change their wives, sometimes by force. Wives look at their husbands as their projects. Parents try to live vicariously through their children. We see it in the work place. The old guard is unable to accept new methods and tries to convince and convert the younger workers to “*the right way*.” We see it in churches. Some people try to impose their personal taste as gospel truth.

Now, I want to make something clear. There are some unchangeable, unbreakable, untouchable principles in God's Word that can't be modified according to the year you are living in or the mood of the populace. Those are fewer in number. There are also some things that are just a matter of preference, such as the time to start Sabbath School, whether we should sing two or four stanzas. Do we play the organ or the keyboard? Does the congregation have to kneel for every prayer? What version of the Bible should be used? Those are just some of the millions of details about which good Christians may disagree without being disagreeable.

The problem comes when we try to make people into our image. As an example, I will use styles of preaching. I use some humor in my presentations, because that is who I am. I take my job very seriously, but I have found out by personal experience that humor in the pulpit, when it is done in a tasteful way, breaks down barriers. Invariably, every time I speak, some don't listen to the words but concentrate on criticizing the style. There is nothing wrong with preferring a different style, yet the problem comes when they write notes and have conversations with me (most not very pleasant) about how I should change and be different than how God has made me. God has confirmed to me that I should not be a generic anyone but be the real me.

To *David's* credit, he did what many of us probably would not have done, especially at that age. He told

the king no. I believe the words he used were “I cannot go.” God’s hand was in all of this, because *David’s* response did not make the king go crazy (and we know how bipolar *Saul* could be). My humble suggestion to you is this. Be yourself. Develop your own gifts. Try to be the best you that you can.

So there you have it. Now you know. Let’s go kill some giants. *“David replied to the Philistine, ‘You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. Today the Lord will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! And everyone assembled here will know that the Lord rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. This is the Lord’s battle, and he will give you to us!’ ”*
(1 Samuel 17:45-47). ■

~ apendix ~

epic win

bible studies.



recover

look

*"I hurt with the hurt of my people. I mourn and am overcome with grief. ²² Is there no medicine in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why is there no healing for the wounds of my people?" **Jeremiah 8:21-22** (NLT).*

investigate

Several types of abuse exist: Physical, Spiritual, Mental / Emotional, and Sexual. You more than likely have experienced at least two of these kinds of abuse—either personally or in the life of a person you know. Today we will take a look at some biblical principles regarding this sensitive subject.

1. Who is responsible for the pain in this world?
Revelation 12:9, Romans 1:24.

2. Even from Bible times, God provided guidelines for showing respect and the consequences for abuse of every kind. Let's review two examples here.

- a. Abuse through incest. *Deuteronomy 27:22.*
- b. Respect and care of children. *Matthew 18:6.*

3. Abuse can create deep wounds, especially if you don't talk about it or forgive. Abusers thrive on secrecy. Here are two suggestions from the Bible about the importance of sharing your struggles:

a. How did David feel when he had not been able to speak about his situation? Read *Psalms 32:3*.

Why is it important to share what has happened to us with a responsible and qualified person?

b. What is another blessing of sharing your pain with another? *James 5:16*.

4. Why is it so important to forgive?
What does forgiving really mean?

5. What can I do for people who have been abused?
Hebrews 12:12-13, Isaiah 35:3-4.

6. What does God promise concerning the originator of all abuse? *John 10:10.*

find

You can take three important actions:

1. Deal with it correctly. According to a 1996 study, about 67 percent of Hispanics sitting in our pews in North America have been abused. How do we deal with it? We speak about it, we address it, and we provide help to our hurting communities. What is your church or small group doing to prevent and heal abuse in your community? What are you doing personally?

2. Forgive it completely. Holding resentment inside you is like drinking poison and hoping the rat will die. We must forgive. Forgiving does not mean the restoration of the relationship or even welcoming a known abuser into your home. It means that you treat with respect and love the one who hurt you. If you have been a victim, the first step is to forgive. Who do you need to forgive today?

3. Grow from it immediately. The moment you forgive, you start growing. As you leave the past behind, your experiences can help other people who may be suffering as you did and bring comfort to those who can identify with your pain.

engage

Today pray for God to help you do the following three things: Deal with, forgive, and grow from abuse. If you have never experienced abuse yourself, be thankful and look for ways to bless others who have.

dating

look

*Abraham was now a very old man, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. ² One day Abraham said to his oldest servant, the man in charge of his household, "Take an oath by putting your hand under my thigh. ³ Swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not allow my son to marry one of these local Canaanite women. ⁴ Go instead to my homeland, to my relatives, and find a wife there for my son Isaac" **Genesis 24:1-4** (emphasis supplied).*

investigate

1. When it was time for Isaac to get married, where did he look for a wife? **Genesis 24:3-4.**

2. Why is it important to date people of the same values? **2 Corinthians 6:14-15.**

3. What where some of Rebecca's specific worthy characteristics? (*Genesis 24:16*) How was her sexuality?

Genesis 24:17-19. What kind of attitude did she display when asked for a favor? (*Genesis 24:57-58*). How did she relate to her parents?

4. How much time did Isaac date Rebecca before marriage? *Genesis 24:63-66*. Would that work nowa-days? Why?

5. Isaac and Rebecca fell in love and stayed together. What steps can you take to make sure your marriage has a high probability of success?

find

In order to have a good dating relationship, practice the following:

1. Be real. Dating is a way of finding out whether you are compatible, yet many hide their true identity. Be who you are now, helps the adjustment later. The sooner the other person knows who you truly are, and vice versa, the sooner you can know if this is a relationship worth pursuing. Why are some so afraid to be real when dating?

2. Be responsible. Ellen White warns us about “playing with other people’s hearts.” A responsible Christian will not date “because I feel lonely this summer,” or “because all my friends have girlfriends and I feel left out.” If you are not sure, don’t proceed. Have you seen any of your friends get hurt because of irresponsible dating? What can you do to prevent it?

3. Be respectful. Since sex is for marriage, and heavy petting can lead to sex, it is recommended that the physical aspect of dating be kept to a minimum; it should not be the deciding factor on whether you date someone or not. Treat your date like a princess. Treat

yourself like you are worthy. Don't let others use your body for their pleasure, for life is more than looks.

How can you increase your self-worth? What if you have already gone too far, what can you do?

engage

Today make the decision to imitate Rebecca. Stay sexually pure. Serve without complaining. Develop a good relationship with the parents. Trust God.

sex

look

“He (Satan) was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” John 8:32, 34, 35.

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Genesis 24:1-4 (emphasis supplied).

investigate

1. What does the Bible call Satan in the text above? Why does he receive those names? Is there any earlier case in the Bible when he lied? When was the “beginning”? How does he lie in the sexual area?

2. Satan means “enemy.” What does it mean that Satan is your enemy? Does he always come at you like an enemy?

3. Complete the sentence: Everyone who sins is

4. Being a slave means that you have no chance to decide your own future, but somebody else does. Can you describe (in your own experience, or maybe as seen in those around you) how sin enslaves people?

5. Jesus says that the only thing that will set us free from slavery is the _ _ _ _ . (Five letters) What is the truth about sex according to God's word?

find

Satan lies to us. That's a fact. And when it comes to sex, he is the father of lies. Satan has a top-notch plan to enslave us through sex by lying about it. You must know three things Satan doesn't want you to know about premarital sex:

1. What you do today affects tomorrow. He wants you to think that you can have sex without consequences. He exemplifies that with fiction. In every movie, TV show, and even TMZ-kind of magazines,

the leading characters go from bed to bed, sleeping around without consequences. But that is fiction, an imaginary tale. The truth is, “you reap what you sow,” *Galatians 6:7*. The truth is that premarital sex affects your tomorrow. It can ruin your health (65 million people in U.S. have an incurable sexually transmitted disease), ruin your plans through an unexpected pregnancy (one in five teenagers have to deal with an unexpected pregnancy in high school), and your emotional stability for the rest of your life. The truth is that what you do today, for good or bad, will surely affect your tomorrows.

2. Premarital sex trains you for divorce. Maybe you’ve experienced or you are experiencing the sadness, hurt, and the blues of your parents’ divorce. It is such a painful experience. Well, premarital sex is training for divorce. Satan lies to you that it is okay to move from relationship to relationship. A relationship comes, breaks up, and another one comes around. Things can go wrong in a relationship, but soon you will replace have another partner. But sex is much more than just physical. It has emotional consequences—and mental and spiritual ones too. When you buy into Satan’s lies about premarital sex, you are preparing for failure. Is your dream to form a healthy and happy family? Then, trust the truth, not the lies.

3. Sex is not for “ready” people, it is for married people. MTV and other TV shows preach that you

should have sex when you're ready. But the One who designed and created you tells you that sex is for married people: "*A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh*" (*Genesis 2:22*). You must trust in God with all your heart and lean not on what your friends and culture may tell you, and God will make your path straight.

engage

For the next week, while watching television or maybe a movie, challenge yourself to catch the multitude of lies Satan communicates about sex. Decide to have the truth set you free from his lies.

friends

look

*"Many will say they are loyal friends, but who can find one who is truly reliable? **Proverbs 20:6** (emphasis supplied).*

investigate

1. How should we choose our friends?

Proverbs 12:16.

2. If you want friends, what should you do?

Proverbs 18:24.

3. What type of friends should you avoid? Why?

Proverbs 22:24, Proverbs 1:10 & 15.

4. One of the things we should avoid if we want to maintain a good friendship is gossip. What happens to friendships when we say “no” to gossip? *Proverbs 26:20*.

5. At the end of the day, who is the one true friend we can always count on? *John 15:15*.

find

When choosing friends, keep these three concepts in mind:

1. Is my friend bringing me closer to Jesus? Our ultimate objective is to become Christ like. The Bible says that “*as iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend (Proverbs 27:17)*”. That means that friends have a chance either to help us grow in our spiritual walk, or guide us away from God. Think about your friend’s faith. Is he or she the stronger Christian, or are you?

2. Is my friend drawing me closer to my goals? One way of getting ahead in life is by having specific, measurable, reachable goals. What are yours? What

career do you want? What about marriage? Where do you want to be in 10 years? Are your friends holding you back, or are they pushing you forward?

3. Is my friend getting closer to me, only because of what he or she can get out of me? Some friends are only interested in what they get from you. Others are very needy and want you so they can unload on you. Both of these kinds of friends are takers, not givers. How can you help your needy / selfish friend stand on his or her own and be a giver, as well as a taker?

engage

I invite you to pay close attention to the choices you make. Are you following the crowd, or do you stand on your own two feet? Look for ways to help your friends be independent of you and dependent upon God.

money

look

“For the LORD your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you” Deuteronomy 15:6.

investigate

1. What does the Bible say about debt, and what is the plan of God for his people regarding it?

Deuteronomy 15:6; Proverbs 22:7; Psalm 37:21.

2. Is it okay to borrow to help others?

Proverbs 22:26-27; 6:1-5.

3. How can debt affect family life? *2 Kings 4: 1-2.*

4. What does the apostle Paul recommend about those who have debt? *Romans 13: 7-8*.

5. Mark the following statements on debt that you believe are true:

- ☐ **Debt** gives a false sense of wealth
- ☐ **Debt** often accompanies greed
- ☐ **Debt** promotes materialism
- ☐ **Debt** raises the cost of products
- ☐ **Debt** puts us at the mercy of the creditor
- ☐ **Debt** brings mental anxiety
- ☐ **Debt** is a form of abusing our future
- ☐ **Debt** limits or cancels contributions to the cause of God
- ☐ **Debt** brings us prestige

find

1. **Testimony.** The way we handle our finances is a testimony to those around us. Please discuss this statement: *“The world is entitled to expect strict integrity of those who profess to be Christians in accordance with the Bible.” “By the indifference of a man to pay his just debts, Christians are in danger of being considered as dishonest” (Ellen G. White, 2 Testimonies, 46, 47).*

2. **Debt.** In a society in which using credit is a life-

style, the Christian should consider seriously and with prayer what debt or debts are acceptable, in keeping with biblical principles. Ask your friends or small group if debt on a house or a car is acceptable, and why.

3. Habits. If you live in debt and want to get out of it, you must first desire to change your habits and then have a plan. You can be sure of God's blessing, because as we have already seen, He wants you to live debt-free.

engage

1. A well-known financial counselor, *Dave Ramsey*, proposes a plan of debt-relief called "the snowball plan." Write down all your debts and consider the total balance and monthly payment for each. Put them in order from smallest to largest. Make every effort you can to pay the smallest debt, even if you have to sell things to do so. Once you've paid that small debt, add the monthly payment from that former debt to the second-in-order, so that debt can be paid off more quickly. When you pay off that debt, continue on up the ladder.

2. To reduce debt is impossible, if your habits of spending money remain the same. Eliminating debt implies not acquiring new debts. Read "*Total Money Transformation*," a book by *Dave Ramsey*. Great reading!

sober

look

*“Because we belong to the day, we must live decent lives for all to see. Don’t participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy” **Romans 13:13** (emphasis supplied).*

investigate

1. What are some specific warnings regarding alcohol for us? **Proverbs 20:1.**

2. The Bible warns us to stay away from drunkards (Read **1 Corinthians 5:11**). Why is that warning so severe? How can you help them if you don’t associate with them?

3. Where can drinking alcohol in any form lead us? **Proverbs 31:4-5.**

4. What effect did alcohol have on *Noah*, a man who loved God, but fell to temptation? *Genesis 9:20-22*.

5. If you want a real experience, with no hangover in the morning, what can you do? *Ephesians 5:18*.

find

Alcohol is dangerous in three ways:

1. Alcohol takes you places you don't want to go. One of the reasons people drink is to "loosen up." This reduces the inhibitions, and can lead you to places sexually that you don't want to go. Can you give an example of someone who got drunk and did something they regretted later?

2. Alcohol makes you stay longer than you wanted to stay. It's much easier to get hooked than it is to get unhooked. We deceive ourselves by thinking we can control it. You can't. As a man once said, "I can stop smoking any time I want; in fact I've done it many times already." It's like gaining weight, easy to gain,

hard to lose. Do you know anyone who is struggling right now with alcohol? Pray for them now!

3. Alcohol hurts your relationships. People later regret things they do under the influence. Hurtful words are spoken, inappropriate sexuality takes place, and in the most extreme cases, death occurs.* You will never regret the drink you did not take. It ruins your relationships, with God and others. How can we help a person who is struggling with alcohol?

engage

Make it a matter of prayer to place before God people you know who are struggling with alcohol, including yourself if that is the case. There is forgiveness and power in Jesus to overcome every addiction known to man.

**For some specific statistics on drunk driving, go to www.madd.org.*

rest

look

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work,¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” Exodus 20:8-11 (emphasis supplied).

investigate

1. Which is the first mention of the Sabbath in the Bible, and what are the circumstances? **Genesis 2:1-4.**

2. Is there historical evidence to support the Sabbath as the seventh day of the week or Saturday?

3. God rested on the seventh day and it was to be a

_____ between Creator and creation (*Exodus 31:17*).

4. Are there any real benefits when we 'keep the Sabbath holy' aside from being obedient to God?

Matthew 11:28-30.

5. Jesus was crucified on the sixth day and resurrected on the first day; what did he do on the seventh day, which was consistent with the rest in our original verse? Read *Matthew 28:1-7*.

find

1. **There are three main ideas in the text above;** can you write down your own impressions or understanding of God's desire for us to keep the Sabbath?

a. **To remember:** _____

b. **To rest:** _____

c. To restore: _____

2. We live in a materialistic, you—are—what—you—produce society. Was God a little bit too optimistic by suggesting that we *“take a day off from it all”*?

3. God’s intentions are to repair us through the Sabbath rest; what does that mean to you?

4. God has made you totally free, and the Sabbath is your chance to express and enact your freedoms:

a) Free to Believe you were made by God. The way the world is set up gives us very little room to remember that our lives are a part of something bigger, and far more important, than what we see. When we remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, we declare our independence from this world and clearly state that God is in control of our lives.

b) Free to Belong to the family of God. One of our greatest needs is to be loved and accepted. Because of the less-than-perfect lives we live, we don’t often feel the love. The Sabbath is a day to remember that we belong to the family of God, in spite of ourselves. Declare your independence from past hurts and pains as you come face to face with the infinite love of God.

c) Free to become citizens of the kingdom of God. We’re all looking for direction. Seems like we spend our lives looking for something that can’t be found. We declare our independence from every power that binds us to this limited world, to become citizens in the

Kingdom of God. We are free to worship God through eternity; free to drink from the limitless wisdom of God through eternity.

engage

Remember these three words: rest, relate and restore. Take a physical Rest from the routine of your day, Relate to God through prayer, reading, listening to music, or a sermon for at least 20 minutes a day; then take time to feel Renewed and Restored for another 10 minutes. Practice this as often as you can and begin to see the Sabbath as a day to rest, to relate to God, and to be restored by His love.

judgment

look

*"I watched as thrones were put in place and the Ancient One sat down to judge. His clothing was as white as snow, his hair like purest wool. He sat on a fiery throne with wheels of blazing fire, 10 and a river of fire was pouring out, flowing from his presence. Millions of angels ministered to him; many millions stood to attend him. Then the court began its session, and the books were opened" **Daniel 7:9, 10***

investigate

1. Who are those who will have to be judged first?
1 Peter 4: 17.

2. Who is this great trial judge? **Daniel 7:9, 10.**

3. For a trial to take place there must exist some evidence that verifies the responsibility of the accused. The Bible says that there is a detailed log of our acts. (See **Daniel 7:10, Revelation 7: 10**). Please fill in the spaces below some of the things the Bible says are recorded in heaven.

a. *Matthew 12:36,37*: _____

b. *Ecclesiastes 12:14*: _____

c. *Psalms 56:8*: _____

4. What is the purpose of the trial? *Revelation 22: 12*.

5. In the judgment there is a judge, an accused person, and even evidence. have you wondered if you have a defense attorney? *1 John 2: 1, 2*.

6. What hope do we have for that positive outcome? *1 John 1:9*.

7. What is the good news of the trial? *Daniel 7:22; Zephaniah 3:15*.

find

1. We are family. Interestingly, the Bible mentions that the trial “begins with the house of God.” As part of the family of God, Jesus will be ready to intercede for you. How do you feel about belonging to the family of God?

2. We are important. Many times we feel that nobody cares about our needs, that nobody notices our tears. But did you not know that our God has a record of them? Share with the group any experience where you have felt that God comforted, encouraged, and showed you that He knows what you are going through.

3. We are responsible. Your decisions today define your future. Make good choices. Today is the time to give your life to Jesus and invite Him to be the owner of your life. With that security, you can go through life with happiness and assurance. Have you given your life to God? If the answer is no, what are you waiting for?

engage

For the next week keep a record of the hard and sad moments you have. Give them to God in prayer. Then watch how God gives comfort in these difficult times. You probably will be surprised to see what a great friend we have in Jesus.

resurrection

look

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 (emphasis supplied).

investigate

As you read the text above, answer these questions:

1. Will the dead precede the living to heaven?

2. When will the resurrection happen?

3. Who will call the dead to life?

4. Who will rise first?

5. What guarantees our resurrection (v.14)?

find

How can we be hopeful in the face of death?

1. Believe in the risen Savior. The most awesome thing about death is that Jesus already defeated it! He even mocks it (1 Corinthians 15). But the good news is that he wants to share that victory with us. He created us to live, and as we connect with Him, the source of life, we have life. Have you surrendered your life to Jesus? Trust your life to Him today. Whom have you lost that you would like to see again?

2. Understand death. People have many different ideas about what happens when we die. The Bible is not silent on this subject. Here are some facts: Life equals God's breath + body (*Genesis 2:7*). Death is the reverse (*Ecclesiastes 12:7*). When we die, we die (*Ecclesiastes 9:5-6; Psalm 104:29; Psalm 146:4; Acts 2:29, 34*). The word soul is a widely misunderstood concept; it means a living being (which the Bible says will die (*Ezekiel 18:4, 20*)). People who die are neither in heaven nor in hell. They are asleep. Those who die, having accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, are waiting to hear the powerful voice of their Creator. What are some of the misconceptions in movies and TV about what happens when we die?

3. Wait for the Second Coming. The text says that we will enjoy heaven until the Second Coming of Jesus, not before (see also *Luke 14:14*). Jesus comes to reward all of us, according to what we have done—but none go ahead of the rest (*Revelation 22:12*). We will all go together. We will enter heaven and receive life together. It will be a great reunion. Do you want to be there? Then make the best decision ever: Give your life to Jesus today! Live life as if He will come today!

engage

Have you lost a loved one? Maybe a friend in the barrio, a brother, a father. Are you concerned about your own future? It is my hope that you find hope in the promise of the resurrection of Jesus.

found

look

“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” **Luke 15:8-10.**

investigate

1. Have you ever lost something very important to you? How did it make you feel?

2. How does the woman in the story react when she loses the coin? What three things does she do?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

3. How important is this coin for the woman? Why is she not satisfied with the other nine?

4. From 1-10, rate how important you think you are to the following people?

Your Parents: ____ Your Friends: ____ Your God: ____

5. How do you imagine God treats a sinner when he repents?

find

1. We must confront our hurts. Things can happen in our youth that can cause profound hurt in our lives. We can lose our trust in parents; we can lose a good friendship; we can lose our values, our purity, even our self-esteem. Some of these losses result from our own bad decisions, but others are completely outside our control. No matter how much we ignore our hurts, they won't simply disappear. We must confront and identify them for them to heal. What loss in your life has hurt you most?

2. Bring you hurts to Jesus. When we get sick we go to the doctor because he has the knowledge and the tools to identify the problem and find a solution. In the same way, when we have been hurt, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, or even sexually, we can come to Jesus and bring Him our hurts. In the same way the woman does in Luke 15:8-10, Jesus turns on the light of our heart and sweeps it carefully, until he identifies the

problem and with his power heals the hurts we have in our lives, no matter how big they may be. Tell Jesus: “I lay before you my hurt of _____

I surrender it to you so you can heal it.

3. Different hurts, different healing times. In the same way that different physical wounds need different recuperation periods the hurts of our hearts will need different time periods to heal. No matter how big is your hurt, God can and wants to heal you! For our hurts to heal we need to identify them, bring them to Jesus, and stay away from those things that will deepen our hurt. What three things do you think you can do to contribute to the healing process?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

engage

Today the pain of your hurt may bother you. Instead of complaining and feeling pity for yourself, or holding a grudge against the person that hurt you, learn this short prayer and repeat it as necessary:

“Thank You, Lord God, for healing my hurts. Thank You for carrying them for me. Thank You for Your healing power, in Jesus’ name, Amen. ”

return

look

*"Jesus continued: 'There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. 13'Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living '" **Luke 15:11** (emphasis supplied).*

investigate

1. What did the younger son demand from his father? (Comment: In Jesus times, to demand the share of the property while the father was still alive meant only one thing—the child wanted his father to die so he could lead his own live. Such insolence was punished with immediate expulsion from the family and the community.)

2. Instead of punishing his son for his insolence, how did the father respond to his son's demand?

3. After getting what he wanted, what did the younger son do next? (COMMENT: Selling the part of the property that had been inherited, while the father was alive, was unthinkable back in those times. By doing that, the young man was renouncing his condition as son. He was telling his father and brother to count no more on him... forever! Furthermore, by moving to a distant country and living wildly, this young man contaminated himself, according to Jewish laws. Even worse, he filled his soul with guilt and desperation.

4. When the young man realized his life was out of control and that he needed help, whom did he turn to?

5. What three actions things did the father do when he saw his son coming back home? (COMMENT: In first-century Palestine, there was a law that if a rebellious child dared to return home, the community would break a large pot in front of him and cry out "so-and-so is cut off from his people." This ceremony was called the Kezazah, which literally means "to cut off." In Jesus' story, the father races to get to his son ahead of the people of the village, to cut him off from the community. Then he hugs him

and kisses him, indicating that he, the father, is taking upon himself all the shame and rejection his son was about to receive.)

find

Pleasure, addictions, anger, and tears cannot take the place of God's healing. Jesus taught the following three lessons about returning to our Creator, the only healer of our hearts:

1. Acknowledge that your life is out of control.

In Jesus' parable, the father represents God, while the younger son represents everyone who has gone astray from God. Using his freedom of choice, the young man enters a descending spiral of selfishness and pleasure that leads him away from this father and family. When he reaches the very bottom of human despair, however, he accepts he has no power to lead his own life. Mention at least one thing that controls your life and separates you from your beloved ones and from God?

2. Believe that no matter how awful the sins you have committed, God is not mad at you. There is nothing you can do to get God mad at you. God loves you and there is no way you can change that reality. In our parable, the prodigal behaves in the worst imaginable way against his father. Yet, his father never

changes his accepting love. Furthermore, the father takes upon himself all the guilt, shame, and rejection his son deserves. So it is with God and how He relates to you. He loves you no matter what! Are you willing to talk to God right now and say, “Thank you, God, for loving me in a way I could never imagine”? Close your eyes here and now and repeat that prayer.

3. Confess your sins. The moment the prodigal confessed his sins, he became a free man, because he took responsibility for his actions. But most important, he freed his father to restore him. That’s the power of confession! It brings freedom and redemption to the offender. Do you want to confess your sins to God right now? That’s all you need to start a new walk in your life!

engage

Make a point to reach out to God and go to church. Maybe it has been a while, but don’t worry, you are always welcome.

trials

look

*Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." ³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." **Matthew 26: 36-44.***

investigate

1. In Jesus' great hour of trial, why do you think He only took Peter, James, and John with Him?

2. How did Jesus feel during this time of crisis? Have you ever felt like that? When?

3. What are the differences between the three prayers of Jesus to his Father? *Matthew 26:39, 42, 44.*

4. What was the will of the father? How hard is it for you when the will of the Father seems unusually difficult?

5. What did the angel come to do in Jesus' moment of crisis? *Luke 22:43-44.*

find

1. In our moments of crisis we need friends to pray with us and for us: It is vital to have friends who can pray for us during our times of greatest crisis. Jesus is our greatest friend, and He will always pray for us. He prayed for Peter on that Thursday night, that his faith would not fail. Jesus also prays with you. Who is going through a crisis today and needs you to pray for them? If you are facing a crisis, what friends can you call on to pray for you?

2. Be specific with God about the areas of your life where you are struggling to do His will and pray, pray until God's will is done in your life: There are times when it seems difficult to do God's will, especially in times of crisis, when we are depressed. We need to be open with God and lay our true feelings before Him. As we do this, we will be strengthened by His Holy Spirit to do His will. Are you struggling with difficulties for which you need your friends' prayers?

3. God will ALWAYS strengthen you in the hour of crisis: Jesus, the Creator of the universe and the perfect One, in His hour of crisis received an angel sent by His Father, to strengthen Him—but not to deliver Him—in His hour of crisis. God promises to strengthen you in your hour of crisis and sometimes he sends angels in the form of friends. *"In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; And He bore them and carried them all the days of old"* **Isaiah 63:9**. Is there something in your life that you feel you don't have the strength to overcome?

engage

This week take a notepad and a pencil and ask God to enlighten you about three friends that need intercessory prayer. Pray for them all this week. At the end of the week send them a card or give them a call and let them know the Lord impressed you to pray for them this week.

decisions

look

"As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴²but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her"
Luke 10:38-42 (emphasis supplied).

investigate

1. Who showed up at *Martha's* house? **Luke 10:38**

2. Describe *Martha's* emotions. List at least three of them here.

3. The name *Martha* means “is becoming bitter.”

Why do you think Jesus mentions her name twice?

What could be making her bitter?

4. As you look at *Martha's* attitude, how do you imagine she sounds as she talks to Jesus in verse 40?

5. Jesus tells *Martha* that *Mary* has “chosen” that which is better. How hard is it for you to take time out to spend time with Jesus?

find

In order to focus your spiritual life, you must make the following three decisions daily.

1. Choose the important over the urgent. *Mary* chose the important, while *Martha* chose the urgent. Beware of the “tyranny of the urgent” that seeks to divert you from concentrating on the important issues in life—like God, family and personal growth. What are one or two urgent things you keep doing that keep you away from the important ones?

2. Chose the best over the good. The most difficult decision for a Christian is not between good and bad, it's between good and better. In what areas of your life are you settling for "just good enough"?

3. Chose the permanent over the temporary. The latest fad, summer blockbuster, phone, clothing, all look to gain our immediate attention. They all have something in common: they are temporary. Don't concentrate your efforts on people, pastimes. and problems that will not be here 10 years from now. What problem are you fretting about today that you know will soon pass?

engage

This week, memorize these three words: important, best, permanent. Every time a decision needs to be made, ask yourself if the choice you are making is in line with those three words. Share what you learned this week with a friend who needs to hear this.

Jesus

look

*And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. ²⁷When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” ²⁹Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.” **Mark 5:25-29.***

investigate

1. Read together Mark 5: 25-26. The Bible says that this woman had “suffered.” How do you think that the disease had affected the most important areas of her life?

- a. In her role as wife,
 - b. in her work,
 - c. in the church.
-
-
-

2. What was the plan that this woman devised for her healing? *Mark 5: 27-28.*

3. How long did it take Jesus to heal her?
Mark 5: 29. Does he always do that? Why?

4. How did she feel close to Jesus, for the second time? *Mark 5: 33.*

5. There were two blessings that she received that day—an emotional one and a physical one. Can you identify them? *Mark 5: 34.*

find

The purpose of this section is to apply lessons learned from the biblical story to our lives.

1. In what areas of your life are you “suffering,” or at least having a hard time? Write them here.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

**2. What plans to you have to address those issues?
How will God be involved in them?**

3. In what area of your life does God need to do a miracle today? Will you pray for that?

engage

Jesus can heal you. This week, wake up every day believing that that day Jesus can do a miracle in your life. Turn over your hurts, hang-ups, and life to Him.

