

(The Purpose of Failure) 1. God's Purpose in Man's Failure

by Zac Poonen

God allows failure to sift us and remove the chaff from our lives, making us humble and broken, and preparing us for Spirit-filled service.

Scripture: Luke 22:31

Topics: "Hope and Restoration", "God's Purpose in Failure"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes God's purpose in man's failure, using Peter's denial of Christ as a key example. He explains that while God allows failure, it serves to strengthen our faith and reveal His unwavering love for us, even at our lowest points. Poonen encourages believers to embrace their failures as opportunities for growth and transformation, reminding them that God's kindness leads to repentance and restoration. He highlights the importance of honesty with God and the necessity of being broken to truly serve others. Ultimately, the message is one of hope, emphasizing that no one is beyond redemption and that God can use our failures for His glory.

Transcript

(A message given at Christian Fellowship Centre, Bangalore, India, on Sunday, April 9, 2000)

Let's turn to Luke chapter 22 verse 31.

Here we read of Jesus warning Peter of a danger that lay ahead of him. He told him

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

We all know that Peter denied the Lord three times that very night. In verse 34, we read that Jesus told Peter, "I say to you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."

What I want to share with you this morning is God's purpose in man's failure. This will encourage all of us who feel frustrated and discouraged because of our failures to have hope.

The question first of all is: Does God allow failure? Does He permit it? Is there a purpose in failure? Or is failure something that has no purpose at all in God's perfect will and something that God cannot use to further his purposes!

When we read this passage, we see that God did not prevent Peter from denying Him. Why didn't Jesus say "Simon I have prayed for you that you will not deny Me even once." Why did the Lord pray only that Peter's faith may not fail, even if Peter himself fell?? Isn't it interesting that the Lord did not pray that Peter might not fall?

Some of us would like the Lord to pray for us that we might never fall. We would like the Lord to say to us "My son, my daughter, I have prayed for you that you will never fall and never fail." But interestingly enough, our Lord doesn't pray such a prayer for us.

What did Jesus pray for Simon? That when Satan tempted him, his faith would not fail. He didn't pray that Peter should not fall in temptation, but that when he did fall, his faith in God's perfect love would not fail him - so that even when Peter reached the bottom of the pit of failure, he would confess, "God still loves me".

That is faith - and that is the confession we must always have on our lips and in our hearts - no matter how low we may have sunk or fallen - that God still loves us, JUST AS WE ARE.

That was the confession of the prodigal son. When he had reached so low that he could not go any lower, he still believed that his father loved him. I can't imagine anyone reaching any lower than the prodigal son had reached - eating what the pigs eat. That boy was at rock-bottom. But when he reached rock-bottom, he remembered one thing: That his father still loved him. Otherwise he would never have returned home. Supposing he'd heard that his father had died and that his elder brother was now running the house, do you think he would have come back home? No. He knew what his elder brother was like. And knowing that, he would never have come back. He came back only because he knew that his father loved him.

There are sinners who never come to some churches because they sense that the pastor or elders there are like that elder brother in the parable. You can't blame those sinners then for not coming. If however the elders of a church are like that father, then the worst of sinners will come to that church seeking salvation, just like they came to Jesus. Our church must have such an image, that the worst of sinners feel free to come to us. If Jesus is really in our midst, the worst of sinners will definitely come and find salvation in our midst.

There's hope for all who've failed thoroughly, who've made a mess of their lives, and who've reached rock bottom. From there the Lord can pick you up and take you to the heights of glory. His prayer for us is that our faith in God's love should not fail at any time.

If you don't need this message today, dear brother and sister, you'll certainly need it one day in the future - when you hit rock bottom. Remember one thing in that day: that God still loves you, no matter where you are, or how low you have fallen. May your faith in God's love not fail in that hour.

Faith is basically believing that God still loves us.

He doesn't love our sin, He doesn't want us to continue in our sin. He's like a father who sees his child's diseases and hates those diseases, but loves his child. Think of a mother who sees her child full of leprosy or tuberculosis. That mother loves her child so much, but hates those diseases with all her heart. God

loves sinners but He hates their sin.

We see God's love for sinners and His hatred of sin on Calvary's cross. His love for sinners is seen in that He allowed Jesus to die on the cross for us. His hatred of sin is seen in His turning His face away from Jesus when Jesus bore the sin of the world on the cross.

People sometimes ask how a God of love can send people to Hell. What is Hell like? Hell is a place that God has forsaken completely - a place where God cannot be found. This earth has not been forsaken by God. That's why there's still so much of goodness and beauty on this earth. Look at the beauty of creation, for example. Look at the decency and goodness there is in many human beings. Demons would like to possess ALL human beings, but they're unable to, because God has put a restraining wall around people, so that demons can't do what they like. It is God's mercy also that gives man health, prosperity and many other comforts. All these blessings are bestowed by God on both good and evil people. All this proves that God has not forsaken this world. But Hell is not like that. In Hell there is no mercy at all - because Hell is a truly God-forsaken place.

There is goodness in many unconverted people in this world, because the influences of God are still over them. But once they go to Hell, those very same people will become as evil as the devil himself - because the mercy of God will no longer be over their lives.

In Hell, people will experience for the first time what it is like to be totally forsaken by God. That was what Jesus experienced on the cross. Jesus experienced Hell on the cross for those three hours of darkness, when God actually forsook Him. There we see how much God hates sin.

So what is the answer? Can a God of love send people to Hell? The answer to that lies in the answer to this other question: Could a God of love allow His own Son to face Hell on the cross, when the sin of the world was upon Him? If He could do that, He can send people to Hell too. A God of love will turn His face away from those who continue in sin, who say to God, "I am not going to listen to you. I have chosen my own way and I will continue along it forever."

The Bible says in

Proverbs 29:1 (paraphrased) "A man who is corrected many times and refuses to accept correction will one day suddenly be destroyed and he will not have another chance".

If a man keeps on refusing God's loving invitations, he is in real danger.

Now I don't want any of you over-sensitive brothers and sisters to feel condemned hearing that - because that verse was not written for those who fall into sin, but to warn those who love to sin and who want to continue in it. It was not written for those who try to live in purity but keep falling. It was written for rebels, who defy God and want to keep on sinning.

How can you know whether you are a rebel? That's very easy to find out. Just ask yourself whether you have a desire to repent and to turn back to God? If there's even the slightest desire within you to turn to God and to love Him, then that proves that the Holy Spirit is still working in your life and that God is seeking to draw you to Himself. You may be a failure, but you're not a rebel. There's a vast difference between one who is failing and one who is rebelling.

It was with a purpose that God allowed Peter to fail. That purpose was to sift Peter. What Satan really wanted was to destroy Peter altogether, but God would not allow him to do that. God does not allow us to be tested or tried beyond our ability. So Satan was allowed to sift Peter. As a result of his failure, Peter was cleansed of a whole lot of chaff in his life.

That is the real purpose with which God allows us to fail too.

Isn't it a good thing for the chaff to be removed from our lives? Certainly. When a farmer harvests the wheat, he has to sift it before he can use it. Only then will the chaff be removed from it.

The Lord uses Satan to remove the chaff from our lives. Amazingly enough, God accomplishes this purpose by allowing us to fail repeatedly!! God used Satan to fulfil that purpose in Peter and He will use Satan to fulfil that purpose in our lives too. There's a lot of chaff in all of us - the chaff of pride, self-confidence and self righteousness. And God uses Satan to make us fail repeatedly, in order to remove that chaff from us completely.

Whether the Lord is succeeding in fulfilling this purpose in your life or not, you alone know. But if the chaff is being removed, you will be humbler and less self-righteous. You won't look down on others who fail. You won't consider yourself better than anyone else.

As I said, God permits Satan to remove the chaff from us, by allowing us to fail repeatedly. So don't get discouraged if you fail. You are still in God's hand. There is a glorious purpose that's being fulfilled through your repeated failures. But your faith in God's love for you must not fail at such times. That was what Jesus prayed for Peter and what He's praying for us today. He's not praying that we may never fail, but He's praying that when we do reach rock-bottom, our confidence in God's love will still be unshaken.

Only through many experiences of failure do we finally reach a "zero point", where we're truly broken. It was when Peter reached that point, that he had a second "conversion" (Luke 22:32 - KJV). He turned around. The proof that Jesus' prayer for Peter was answered is seen in the fact that when Peter hit rock-bottom, he turned around. He didn't just lie down there discouraged. He didn't lose his faith. He got up. God had let him go on a long leash. But when Peter reached the end of that rope, God pulled him back.

It's a wonderful thing to be a child of God. When God lays hold of us, He puts a rope around us to protect us. There's a lot of slack in that rope, and you may slip up and fall many thousands of times and even drift away from the Lord. But one day, you'll reach the end of that rope. And then God will pull you right back to Him.

Of course, you can decide at that point, to cut off the rope and run away. Or you can choose to be broken by God's kindness and mourn and return to Him. That's what Peter did. He wept and turned back to the Lord. But Judas Iscariot didn't do that. He cut away the rope - in rebellion against God's authority over his life - and was eternally lost. But I trust you'll do what Peter did.

Jesus then told Peter, "When you turn back and are strong once again, strengthen your brothers".

It is only when we are broken that we can be strong enough to strengthen others.

It was only when Peter was weak and broken, that he became really strong - so strong that he was able to strengthen his brothers and sisters. We could say that Peter's preparation for Spirit-filled service came

through his experience of failure. If he had been filled with the Holy Spirit, without this experience of failure, he would have stood up on the day of Pentecost as a proud man, as a man who had never failed, who could look down, despisingly, at the poor lost sinners in front of him. And God would have become his enemy, for God resists the proud!!

That is the tragedy that has overtaken a lot of Christians today who were once filled with the Holy Spirit. They were never broken. They were genuinely filled with the Spirit perhaps, but they were never broken. And so, through pride, they lost the anointing very soon.

In my own life, God taught me the truths of the way of cross and of brokenness, long before He filled me with the Holy Spirit. That was good for me, because it prevented me from going astray. God shattered my self-confidence and my self-righteousness through many years of failure - yes, it was years of failure, day after day. If I were to draw a graph of the 60 years of my life, it would be something like this: When I was born, I was way up there - innocent and sweet, like all babies are, never having sinned. After I was born again (when I was 19 years old), things went well for a period of time - in fact for a number of years. The graph began going up slowly. But as God began to bless my ministry and I became better known in Christian circles, pride got into me and my graph started going down, without my even realizing it. Outwardly I was still a well-known preacher. But my inner life and walk with God had begun to deteriorate. I had become a backslider - inwardly. Finally, I came to a point where I would say the graph of my life hit rock-bottom. That was 26 years ago. At that point, I seriously thought of giving up the ministry altogether - because I didn't want to continue deceiving people by preaching what I didn't practise. At that point, I deserved only judgment from God for my hypocrisy and my backsliding. But instead of judging me and sending me to Hell, do you know what God did? He filled me with the Holy Spirit.

Why did He do that? Because God's ways are not our ways. Let me use an illustration for you to understand the wonder of that!

Think if you were an employee of a large multinational company, and you had been unfaithful to the company, disobeying their orders, taking advantage of their goodness and disgracing their name. One day, you do something terribly wrong. That's the last straw. The Chairman then comes to you, and instead of sacking you, tells you, "We have decided to forgive you everything and to triple your salary from today." Can you imagine such a thing happening? No? Well, that just shows us that God's ways are not man's ways. Because that's a picture of what God did for me 25 years ago.

What was the result of God treating me like that? Did it make me take advantage of God's kindness and make me sin even more from that day? No. On the contrary, as it says in Romans 2:4, "the kindness of God led me to repentance." It led me to mourning - and to brokenness. God's kindness broke me and gave me a longing to live a pure and holy life for Him thereafter.

But I want to be honest with you here. The graph of my life has not steadily gone up since that day. No. I still have my ups and downs, like other struggling Christians. Like Paul, I still have "conflicts without and fears within". I still need the help of my brothers "to be comforted when I am depressed" (2 Corinthians 7:5, 6). But I am seeking to press on to perfection.

God had to allow me to fall repeatedly into the pit of failure, before He could have His way with me. And it took Him 16 years after I was born again, before He could bring me to that zero-point. By that time I was 35 years old. Half my life was over. It may not take that long for you, because you may not be as stubborn as I was. But I wanted to give you my testimony, to encourage you, so that you will never give up hope. If

God could do that for me, He can do that for any of you.

There's no-one who is beyond hope. Did you hear that? No-one is beyond hope. There's hope for everyone of you, as long as you're alive. Hope is lost only when you are dead.

Peter had to come to such a zero-point too, before he could be what God wanted him to be.

Once we have been to the bottom ourselves, we can never despise others who are still there. We can never look down thereafter on sinners, or backslidden believers, or even on Christian leaders who fall. We can never be proud of our victory over sin, because we know what failures we ourselves were at one time.

That's why Peter himself warned other Christians saying, "Don't ever forget how you yourself were once cleansed from your sins" (2 Peter 1:9). He warns them there that if they do forget that, they will become blind and short-sighted. I don't ever want to be blind or short-sighted. I want to have a long-range vision - of heavenly values and eternal values - at all times.

Who are the short-sighted ones? Those who value earthly things - the pleasures of sin, material wealth and man's honour and approval. All such people are short-sighted. We need to feel sorry for such believers. If you see a man whose physical vision is so poor that he can't see anything more than 10 feet ahead of him, you don't get angry with him. You feel sorry for him. If you see a man who needs to keep a book 2 inches from his eyes in order to read it, you don't get angry with him. You feel sorry for him, don't you? If an eye-doctor asks a man wearing thick lenses whether he can read the "eye-chart" and the man replies that he can just about see the top letter but is not sure whether it is an "E" or an "S", what does the doctor do? Does he get angry with him? No. He feels sorry for him.

And when we see believers who are so short-sighted as to live for money and the pleasure of sin and the approval of man, it's no use rebuking them. We must feel sorry for them, because they are so terribly shortsighted. They are going to have tons of regret when they stand before the Lord one day.

There are lots and lots of believers like that. And do you know how they became blind? They forgot "their purification from their former sins" (2 Peter 1:9). They forgot the pit from which God pulled them out. They became proud of the fact that God blessed them subsequently.

I never want to forget the pit from which God pulled me out. I know that all my sins have been blotted out and that God does not remember even a single sin that I have ever committed. I stand before God today, just as if I had never sinned even once in the 60 years of my life - because I have "been justified by Christ's blood" (Romans 5:9). That's how God sees me. But I will never forget what I once was. God says to me "I will not remember your sins any more" (Hebrews 8:12). But I will always remember what I once was.

Now, I don't remember my past in such a way as to allow Satan to condemn me or depress me with the thought of my sins. No. Never. "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). When the devil accuses me I tell him straight to his face that "the blood of Jesus has cleansed me from ALL my sins". I overcome Satan "by the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 12:11). But I'll never forget the pit in which I once was, when God met with me and filled me with His Holy Spirit.

Like God once told Judah, I too was like

"an unwanted baby thrown out in the open field, and pitied by no-one. When the Lord came by that way and saw me squirming in my blood, He picked me up, bathed me, clothed me and made me perfect with His splendour" (Ezekiel 16:5, 6, 9, 10, 14).

How is it with you my brother, my sister? I know that many of you have been filled with the Holy Spirit. But I am not sure if God has succeeded in breaking you and shattering your self-confidence and your pride. It's very easy to find out if that has happened. Just answer these two questions:

First of all: Do you look down on others - perhaps those in other denominations?

We may disagree with many Christians on doctrinal matters, but we must never look down on any of them. I can honestly say that I consider many Christians in other denominations to be better men than I am myself. I am not able to work with many of them, because of our doctrinal differences; but I don't despise any of them.

Do you ever say, like the Pharisee, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people" (Luke 18:11)? If so, then you are not a broken man, whatever experience of the Holy Spirit you may have had.

And then, a second question: Are you proud of your spiritual progress or of your accomplishments?

A broken man recognizes that nothing good dwells in his flesh and so he is quick to give the glory to God for any fruit that he sees in his life or his ministry.

So these are the two marks of a broken man:

He does not look down on anyone - believer or unbeliever.

He does not glory in his spiritual growth or in his ministry.

Jacob is a classic example of a man whom God succeeded in breaking. He had two meetings with God - one at Bethel (Genesis 28) and the other at Peniel (Genesis 32).

Bethel means "the house of God" (a type of the church) and Peniel means "the face of God". We all need to go beyond entering the church of God to seeing the face of God.

At Bethel, it says that "the sun set" (Genesis 28:11) - only a geographical fact, but also indicative of what was happening in Jacob's life, because the next 20 years were a period of deep darkness for him. Then at Peniel, it says, "the sun rose" (Genesis 32:31) - again a geographical fact, but Jacob too had finally come into God's light.

Like Peter's two conversions, many believers who have walked with God through the ages, have also had two meetings with God. The first was when they entered the house of God (the church) through being born again. The second was when they met God face to face and were filled with the Holy Spirit and their lives were transformed.

At Bethel, Jacob dreamt of a ladder set on earth whose top reached up to heaven. In John 1:51, Jesus interpreted that ladder as referring to Himself - the Way from earth to Heaven. So what Jacob saw was actually a prophetic vision of Jesus opening up the way to Heaven. The Lord then promised Jacob many things in that dream. But Jacob was so earthly minded that he could only think of earthly security, physical health and financial prosperity. And so he said to God "Lord if You take care of me on this trip and give me

food and clothing and bring me safely home, I'll give you 10% of my earnings." Jacob treated God like a watchman who was to take care of him. And if God did that, Jacob would pay Him His wages - 10% of his income!!

That's exactly how many believers treat God today too. They desire only material comforts from Him. And if the Lord gives them these things, they attend the church-meetings faithfully and give some of their money for the Lord's work. Such believers are actually doing business with God, seeking their own comfort and profit, just like any worldly businessman.

Jacob spent 20 years of his life grabbing earthly things. He tried to grab a wife from Laban's family and got two! He didn't want two, but he got two anyway!! Then he cheated Laban and grabbed his sheep and thus became a very rich man. He had gone penniless to Laban's house, but ended up as a very rich man there. No doubt he attributed his prosperity to God's blessing - as many believers do today!!

But what is the real mark of "God's blessing"? Is it prosperity? No. It is to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

What's the use having a good job, a good house and many comforts, if your life is still useless to God and to man?

But God hadn't finished dealing with Jacob. He met him a second time at Peniel.

I want to say to you, my brothers and sisters, that many of you need a second encounter with God - an encounter that will take place when you hit rock bottom in your life - and when God, instead of judging you and sending you to Hell, fills you with His Holy Spirit!

We read in Genesis 32 that Jacob was scared because he had just heard that Esau (whom he had cheated of the birthright 20 years earlier) was coming out to meet him. He was sure that Esau would kill him. It's good for us when God allows us to face certain situations that scare us. Because, when we are afraid of what men might do to us, we will draw near to God.

At Peniel, Jacob was alone (Genesis 32:24). God has to get us alone first of all before he can meet with us. That's why Satan has ordered life in today's world to be so rushed and busy (especially in the cities) that even many believers have hardly any time to be alone with God. Their lives have become so busy, that matters of low priority (like God) have been crowded out of their timetable altogether! This is the tragedy in today's Christendom.

God wrestled with Jacob for many long hours that night, but Jacob would not yield. That wrestling was symbolic of what had been going on in Jacob's life for the previous 20 years. And when God saw that Jacob was stubborn, He finally dislocated his hip from its socket. Jacob was only about 40 years old at that time, and he was a very strong man. His grandfather Abraham had lived up to 175. So, we could say that Jacob was in the prime of his youth, with 75% of his life still ahead of him. To get a dislocated hip at such a young age would have been the last thing he wanted - for it would have shattered all the plans he had made for his future. To understand it in today's terms, it would be like a young man of 20 getting his hip dislocated, and having to use a crutch for ever after!! That can be a shattering experience. Jacob would never be able to walk without a crutch for the rest of his life.

God had tried in so many ways to break Jacob but He had not succeeded; and so He finally gave him a permanent physical disability. That succeeded in breaking Jacob finally.

God may do the same for us, if He finds that we need it. He disciplines only those He loves, in order to save them from some greater catastrophe.

If however God has stopped correcting you, then He may allow you, even as a backslider, to live in good health and earn plenty of money and waste your life. But who would want that? I would rather let God deal with me drastically and discipline me and break me down (even physically if necessary) right now, so that I can walk with Him and fulfil His purposes on earth.

Even the great apostle Paul needed a thorn in the flesh to keep him broken (2 Corinthians 12:7). Paul's thorn in the flesh may have been some physical disability that annoyed him continuously. He prayed to God again and again that this "messenger of Satan" be taken away. But God said, "No. Even though it is a messenger of Satan, I won't take it away. You need it to keep you humble - so that you can be useful to Me and to your fellow-men".

After God had dislocated Jacob's hip, He told him, "All right, I have done My job. Now let Me go. You never wanted Me. You only wanted women and money." But Jacob wouldn't let go of God now. He had been changed - at last! This man who had spent his life grabbing women and property now grabs hold of God and says

"I won't let You go unless You bless me".

What a great work was accomplished in Jacob's heart when his hip was dislocated, so that He now desired only God.

Like the old saying goes, "When you have nothing left but God, you will find that God is more than enough"!! That's true.

Now God asks him, "What is your name?" And Jacob replies, "My name is Jacob". "Jacob" means deceiver. Jacob admits at last that he is a deceiver.

Are you perhaps a deceiver too? Have you been fooling others around you that you are a spiritual man? If so, will you be honest with God today and tell Him that you're a hypocrite?

Many years earlier, when his blind father Isaac had asked him his name, Jacob had pretended that he was Esau. But now he was honest. And the Lord said to him immediately, "You won't be a deceiver (Jacob) any more" (verse 28).

Isn't that an encouraging word?

Did you hear it?

"You won't be a deceiver any more"

Hallelujah!

It's not that you won't fall into sin anymore. But there won't be any deception in your life any more. There won't be any guile in your life anymore.

And then God told Jacob, "Your name will henceforth be Israel (prince of God), for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed". What a transformation - from a deceiver to a prince of God. And it

was all accomplished only when Jacob was broken.

That's our calling too - to be seated with Christ on His throne, as a prince, exercising spiritual authority over Satan, and releasing men and women from Satan's bondage. As members of the body of Christ, we are to have power with God and with men and prevail. We're called to be a blessing to all men. But that can happen only when we're broken. And we can be broken only when we're honest with God about our hypocrisy and our deception.

Many centuries later, when a descendant of Jacob, Nathaniel, met Jesus, the Lord said of Him, "Here is a true Israel in whom there is no guile" (John 1:47)!! He then reminded Nathaniel of the ladder that Jacob had seen at Bethel and told him that he too was an "Israel" - not because Nathaniel was perfect but because there was no guile or deception in him.

It says here that Jacob named that place "Peniel" for he had finally seen the face of God. At Bethel, he had been taken up with the house of God. You may have been in the house of God for many years and yet you may not have seen the face of God. Then you need a second encounter with God - where you see His face.

Jacob says in excitement,

"Now I see Your face O God and my life is preserved."

"I should have been thrown out of the company, but my salary has been tripled!!"

"I should have gone to Hell, but He filled me with the Holy Spirit instead!! Hallelujah!!"

I think I know the reason now, why many believers are not filled with the Holy Spirit. They're trying to earn it. They're trying to be worthy of Him. Multitudes of sincere people in many religions too are seeking for the forgiveness of their sins in the same way. Why don't they get forgiveness? Because they're trying to earn it.

How did you receive the forgiveness of your sins? Did you earn it or deserve it? A day came in your life when you realized that you would never deserve God's forgiveness. You came to Jesus then, not as a Christian, but as a sinner. And your sins were forgiven immediately. We must come in the same way to receive the fullness of the Spirit.

There are many believers today who are fasting and praying and tarrying to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing wrong with doing any of these things. They're all good. But if you do any of these things in order to make yourself worthy to receive the fullness of the Spirit, then you are on the wrong track.

When you don't receive the Spirit's fullness, you may even question God saying, "Lord, I have fasted and prayed and waited. Why haven't you filled me". But you can never earn or deserve the Holy Spirit, even as you can never earn or deserve the forgiveness of your sins. Both of these are God's gifts. And you can't pay Him for either. You have to take them free - or you'll never get them.

God's gifts are all free. But man makes the mistake of trying to pay God for them and so he does not receive any of them. If you try to make yourself worthy to receive God's gifts, you cannot receive them. This could perhaps be the main reason why you have not yet been filled with the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was on earth, the Pharisees thought they deserved the forgiveness of sins more than anyone else. But they didn't get it - and they went to Hell. On the other hand, notorious sinners like Mary Magdalene received the forgiveness of sins immediately. A thief who had lived a life of crime was forgiven in a moment and went to Paradise the very night he was crucified.

God gives His best gifts to those who don't deserve them. Those who came to work in the vineyard at the eleventh hour, knew that they deserved nothing and so got paid first. But those who had come earlier, who felt they deserved their wages, ended up last.

In the story of the prodigal son, we read that the father had a ring on his hand. One day, he took it off and gave it to his younger son who had wasted all his money. Why didn't he give it to his elder son? Because he was self-righteous. In man's eyes, it was the elder son who deserved that ring. But the father gave it to his younger son.

That's God's way. He does things like that to humble the pride of man, so that no-one can ever boast in His presence. His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts.

If you've understood this truth that I am trying to emphasize, then you've understood a fundamental principle of how God deals with man.

It was the kindness of God that first led me to repentance. And every subsequent kindness that God ever showed me has only led me to greater repentance.

Let the kindness of God lead you to repentance too. Don't take advantage of His goodness. God has been kind to us in many ways. But we shouldn't imagine that because He is kind to us, He is happy with us. No. He's kind to all men. His kindness is only meant to lead us to repentance. And when we turn to Him without any guile, He will put His ring on our hands too. He has kept that ring especially for sinners like us.

Jesus once told the Pharisees sarcastically, "You are all healthy; you don't need a doctor. It's the sick people who need a doctor and I came for them." (Matthew 9:12). He used sarcasm in love - to wake them up. But they didn't wake up.

Jesus has not come to call those who consider themselves righteous, but those who acknowledge that they are sinners. It is quite possible that many of you sitting here this morning may be as sick as those Pharisees were, without even realizing it - sick with hypocrisy, pride and self righteousness. These diseases are more serious than AIDS and cancer - and they can destroy you! Compared to these sins, other sins like murder and adultery are only like having a cold and a fever. You may think that the murderer and the adulterer are sick. But you could be sicker than both of them!!

God wants to give us His life, His power and His authority. That's why He allows us to fail again and again, until we're finally broken.

In the story of Job, we see how God brought him to rock bottom by allowing him to lose his property, his children, and his health. In a sense he even lost his wife (who nagged him constantly) and his three good friends (who misunderstood him and criticized him). His friends turned out to be self-righteous preachers who took delight in "kicking him when he was down". They kept on "kicking" him, until God in His mercy put an end to it. In the midst of all these pressures, Job justified himself repeatedly. When the Lord finally spoke to him, Job saw the corruption of his self-righteousness - and he repented. He was a righteous man. That was good. But he was proud of his righteousness. That was bad. But after God dealt with him,

he was a broken man. From then on, he would glory only in God. Thus God's purpose for Job was accomplished.

When Job was broken, notice what he said to God, "Up until now, I had only heard about you from all these preachers. But now I see you face to face" (Job 42:5). That was Job's Peniel! He too saw the face of God and his life was preserved. And what was the result? He repented in dust and ashes (verse 6). What those four preachers could not accomplish even after days of preaching, God accomplished in Job, in a moment, by a revelation of His kindness. It was God's kindness that broke Job and led him to repentance.

Most of us hear about God from preachers in the meetings. What we need is a face-to-face encounter with God, where we see His kindness toward us and are broken by it. That's what happened to Peter too. Do you remember what was the very next thing that happened after Peter had denied the Lord and the cock had crowed twice? He saw the Lord's face. Peter had his Peniel too! We read that "the Lord turned and looked at Peter" (Luke 22:61). And what was the result: "Peter went out and wept bitterly" (verse 62).

That look of kindness and forgiveness from Jesus broke that rugged fisherman's heart.

Under the old covenant, God had promised health, wealth and many material blessings to Israel. But there was one blessing which was the greatest of them all - the one described in Numbers 6:22 to 26. There we read that Aaron was commanded to bless the people thus:

"May the Lord make His face to shine on you. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace".

Isn't it a pity that many believers today seek for the inferior blessings of health and wealth (which unbelievers also get without prayer) and for emotional experiences (many of which are spurious) - instead of seeking for the greatest blessing of all that can transform their lives totally - a face to face encounter with God?

Even if we never become rich, and are never healed, if we see the Lord's face, that will meet all our needs.

Job had boils all over his body when he met with God, but he didn't ask God for healing. He said, "I have seen the Lord's face and that's enough for me". The three preachers who pretended to have "discernment" and "a word from God" had told Job that he was being punished for some secret sins in his life. There are self-appointed prophets like that today too with their false "Thus saith the Lord" messages, who bring God's people under condemnation. But God didn't threaten Job with judgment like those three preachers did.

God didn't talk to Job about his failures or even remind him of the complaints he had made (against God) when he was under pressure. God just revealed His kindness to Job - His kindness seen in the beautiful universe He had created for man's enjoyment and in the animals He had created to be subject to man. It was that revelation of God's kindness that led Job to repentance. Many take advantage of God's kindness and abuse it. But with Job, it led him to repentance. And then the Lord blessed Job with double of what he had in the beginning.

The final purpose of God in breaking us is to bless us abundantly - as we read in James 5:11. The goal that the Lord had in mind for Job was to shatter his self-righteousness and his pride and make him a broken man - so that the Lord could show him His face and bless him abundantly. Even the material and physical blessings that God gives us can ruin us by driving us away from Him, if we do not see His face

behind them all. How many believers there are today, who have drifted away from God through material prosperity.

One vision of the Lord's face can deliver us from longing after all that this world can offer:

"Show me Thy face - one transient gleam of loveliness divine;

And I shall never think or dream of other love save Thine.

All lesser light will darken quite, all lower glories wane.

The beautiful of earth will ne'er seem beautiful again."

Peter saw the Lord's face and he wept bitterly. We may now imagine that Peter was finally broken. But no. The Lord had to lead him through one more experience of failure before he was ready for his Peniel.

In John 21:3, we read of Peter telling His fellow-apostles, "I am going fishing". He didn't mean that he was going to fish just that evening. What he meant was that he was quitting being an apostle - because he had been a failure at that - and was going back to fishing permanently!

Peter had given up his fishing business some years earlier when the Lord called him. He had forsaken everything and sincerely followed the Lord, the best he knew how. But he had failed. He now felt that this business of being an apostle was not for him. After 3½ years of listening to the most wonderful messages ever preached, by the greatest preacher who ever lived, he had denied the Lord outright - and that too, not just once, but thrice. He had had enough of trying to be an apostle.

But there was one thing he could still do well - fishing. He had done that since he was a boy and he was an expert at it. So he decided to be a fisherman once again. Some of the other apostles felt the same way too. They too had forsaken the Lord in His hour of need and run away. So they would go back to fishing too, because they had failed at being "apostles"!!

They were sincere men. They had appreciated Jesus' messages and their hearts had burned within them, when listening to Him. They had wanted to be His wholehearted disciples. But they had failed.

Your experience may be like theirs too. You may have heard powerful messages and been stirred by them. Your heart may have burned within you when you heard God's Word. You may have forsaken all and sincerely sought to follow after the Lord. Perhaps you too have made "decisions" time and again, after listening to powerful messages. Perhaps after repeated failures, you may have said to yourself at times, "This time I am really going to make it". But you have gone out and failed again. As you look back today, perhaps all you can see behind you is failure piled upon failure, a thousand times over. Maybe some of you are so discouraged today that you are thinking, "It is no use. I might as well give up. This gospel may work for others. But it doesn't seem to work for me. I am too far gone. I can never make it."

Are you feeling like that today? Have you decided that you are never going to try again, because it's no use trying. Have you decided to go back to the world to seek a fortune or some empty pleasure there? Do you feel that it would have been better for you to have been a thoroughly worldly person who made no pretence of being a Christian rather than claiming to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus?

Well, that was exactly how those apostles felt when they decided to go back to fishing. And the Lord permitted them to go, saying, as it were, "Go ahead. Try fishing and see if you can succeed there." So

Peter and his friends tried all night to catch fish - and failed miserably. They had never had such a bad night in their entire lives.

Once God has called you to be His, He won't let you go. He will make sure that you fail at fishing and at anything else you try! You can try as much as you like, but you will fail. God's love won't permit you to waste your life on trivialities. So, if you try to run away from Him, you will be a failure at everything you try wherever you go - until you come back to Him.

But this doesn't apply to those whom the Lord has not called. There are many crooked businessmen and politicians who've made a lot of 'black' money, who still live in good health - without God. Why does God permit that? Because they're not His children. But I'm not talking about them now. I'm talking to you whom God has called from before the foundation of the world to be His very own.

Actually there were lots of fish in the lake of Galilee, and I'm sure the other fishermen caught plenty of them that night. Those fish went near all those other boats. But God kept them away from Peter's, so that not even one fish came near his. Those other fishermen may even have come by Peter's boat and told him what a good catch they had. And that must have made Peter and his friends wonder all the more why they were not catching anything!

Have you ever wondered why you've never been able to make money in the stock-market, like others around you have done? Do you wonder why your business does not seem to rake in "millions" like that of others? People around you seem to be getting wealthier, but prosperity doesn't seem to come your way at all. That's because God's call is upon your life, and He wants you to have something better than what those worldly people have.

Peter was turning away from the calling of God upon his life and God had to break him once again by making him fail. Those apostles had started fishing at about 6 o'clock in the evening. But Jesus didn't come to them until about 5 o'clock the next morning. The Lord knew that Peter was not going to get any fish that night. Why then didn't He come earlier - as soon as they went out - so that they wouldn't waste their time? Why didn't He come to them at least by 9 o'clock that night? Why did He wait till 5 o'clock the next morning? Why did He wait until they were exhausted, after having struggled for 11 hours and failed?

In the answer to that question we will discover God's design in allowing us to fail. There we will see God's purpose in man's failure. There we will understand why He never came to help us in the past, when we were struggling, despite of our repeated cries for help, and why some of our earnest still remain unanswered.

When Peter and his friends went out to fish that evening at 6 p.m., they were not failures. They were brimming with hope. By 9 p.m. they hadn't caught any fish, and were perhaps a bit discouraged. But their outing could not still be written off as a "failure". By midnight they may have been quite depressed. By 4 am the next morning, they had begun to lose all hope. But they had still to become total failures. For that to happen, they had to fail some more. The graph of their self-confidence was going down. But it had to go all the way down to zero - to rock bottom. And that occurred only at 5 a.m. Then they were ready to give up. Then they must have said, "It's no use trying any more. Let's go home".

That's when the Lord appeared. That is God's way. And the Lord filled their net to overflowing. They had never caught such a good catch on any single day of their lives. That morning they caught 153 large fish. They had probably caught 20 or 30 fish on good days in the past. But this was a real miracle. No-one had

ever caught so many fish in one day in that lake. This catch would go down in the record-books of Galilee! They would remember forever that the Lord did a miracle for them, just when they had given up all hope!

Are you at your "wits end" today, not knowing which way to turn, or what to do next, because everywhere you have turned you have experienced only disappointment and failure. Then you are probably very close to the place where the Lord is going to appear to you. Don't give up. He is only waiting for your self-confidence to reach a zero-point. If He hasn't come to you as yet, it only means that the graph of your self-confidence has not reached a zero-point as yet. He still sees some strength of Self left in you, which also has to go. Lazarus had to die and be buried, before the Lord came!

When Jesus finally came to the lakeside that morning, what did He ask them? He knew that they had no fish. Yet He asked them, "Boys, do you have any fish?" Perhaps none of them answered at first. Maybe He had to ask them that a second time. Then they answered, "No". They admitted that they were failures. They were honest - like Jacob and Job before them. That was all that the Lord wanted them to admit - that they were failures.

One of the greatest joys in my life has been to discover this glorious truth: That the main thing God requires from us, at any point in our lives, is honesty. Then He can do a miracle for us.

"Have you got any fish?" "No". "Cast your net on the right side". And lo a miracle occurs!!

"What is your name?" "Deceiver". "Your name will no longer be Deceiver, but Prince of God". And lo, another miracle occurs.

That is God's way, my brothers and sisters.

All that God requires from us is honesty.

Can't you be honest with Him today?

Our church is like a hospital. We are all patients here. We are not specialists or experts. Some of us have been in this hospital longer than others. But we are all patients. There is only one Doctor - and that is Jesus Himself. We have no consultants in our midst. Specialists and consultants are found among the self-righteous people in the cults, and not in the church of the living God. All are welcome to our hospital. The more serious your sickness, the more you need to be in our midst, to find healing. Our message is just this that, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - among whom we are the greatest".

God meets with those who don't deserve anything. The tax-collector prayed saying "God be merciful to me THE sinner." (Luke 18:13 - NASB). He called himself, "THE sinner". What he meant was that he felt that everyone around him was a saint compared to him! In his eyes, he was THE ONLY SINNER on the face of the earth! Jesus said that that man went home justified. It is only such people whom God justifies.

Let me share something with you about what this word "justify" really means. It is a beautiful word and a liberating word (Luke 18:14).

Look at the pages of a book. Do you see how the right hand margin on every page is straight, just like the left hand margin? In computer-language this is called "justification"! Even though the number of letters in each line is different, yet the computer makes the right hand edge to be perfectly straight. Now if you were to write something on your computer without "justifying" it, you will find that the right hand edge is jagged.

That was how our pages used to come out in the old days when we used manual typewriters. It was impossible to write even a single page in such a way that each line was of equal length. But now we see the miracle of "justification" - and this is not done by just hyphenating the word that comes at the end of each line. No. If you look at the pages in a book, you will find that there are usually no hyphens at all - because that would look ugly too. The computer adjusts the spaces between the words in each line so that every line is neatly "justified".

Even if you have already written 30 lines of a page with jagged edges, you can now command the computer to justify all that you have already written - and lo and behold, by the pressing of a single key, all the lines are immediately justified!!

God does exactly the same thing with us, when He justifies us. Maybe you have made a mess of your life, and each day of your past life has ended with a jagged edge. But if you come to Christ, God JUSTIFIES you in a moment! Every line in your past life is made perfect - just as if you had never sinned even once in your entire life - no jagged edges, only a perfectly straight edge.

That's amazing isn't it? What the computer does for our pages, God does for our lives. There we see a 20th-century illustration of the word "justified".

Let me tell you something further. Once we have commanded the computer to "justify", every line that we write thereafter will also be justified automatically and come out in perfect alignment with the other lines. Justification applies just as much to our future as it does to our past. This is an amazing gospel indeed!

God now sees us in Christ. We have no righteousness of our own to boast about, any longer. Christ Himself is our righteousness

When God justifies us, it will be as though we had never committed a single sin or made a single mistake in our entire lives.

And we are continuously justified by the blood of Christ - because as we walk in the light, the blood of Christ continuously cleanses us from all our sins - both conscious and unconscious.

One of the greatest mistakes we can make when reading the Scriptures is to use the logical way of thinking that we use when working out a mathematical problem. We cannot understand God's mind that way, because God doesn't work according to mathematical logic!! So we cannot use logic when trying to figure out whether we can still fulfil God's perfect plan for our lives, after having made so many mistakes in the past. According to arithmetical logic, that is impossible - because in an arithmetic sum, even if one step is wrong somewhere, the final answer will always be wrong.

If you were to use that logic, you'd have to say that if you missed God's will somewhere in the past (whether that was when you were 2 years old or when you were 52 doesn't really matter), you could never fulfil God's perfect will now, no matter how hard you tried and no matter how much you repented - because it doesn't matter at what stage you make a mistake in an arithmetic problem (whether at step 2 or step 52), your final answer will still be wrong!!

But God says

"My ways are not your ways." (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

Thank God that His plan for our lives doesn't work according to mathematical logic. If it did, then not a single human being (not even the apostle Paul) would have been able to fulfil God's perfect plan. For all of us have failed at some time or the other. We have even failed after becoming believers - so many times. We have sinned deliberately too, after becoming believers. All who are honest will acknowledge that readily. But the amazing truth is that there is still hope for every one of us.

Mathematics unsparingly condemns all who make the slightest error. No allowance is made for even a small mistake. $2 + 2$ does not equal 3.99999999. It has to be exactly 4, no more and no less.

But God's plans don't work like mathematics. In His plan, failure is necessary. There is no way by which any of us can be broken, except through failure. And so we could say, that failure is an essential part of the syllabus in our spiritual education.

Jesus was the only One Who lived without ever failing. But the rest of us (even the best among us) have all had to be broken by God through failure. Even Peter and Paul had to be broken through repeated failure.

So rejoice in the message of the gospel and may the kindness of God lead you to repentance. Let it lead you into a life of joy and perfect rest in God - a rest that comes through knowing that God has "accepted you (permanently) in His Beloved Son" (Ephesians 1:6 - KJV).

Everyday we make so many mistakes. We slip and fall into sin - even if only accidentally or unconsciously. At times, the pressures on us may be so great, that we get depressed and discouraged - and then we are tempted to sin even more. God understands our pressures and He is compassionate. He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability, but will make a way of escape for us. He can straighten out everything in each of our lives.

The Christian life does not work according to human logic. It works according to the miracle-working power, the perfect wisdom and the perfect love of a heavenly Father.

No-one can ever type out his life with perfect lines and produce a perfectly straight edge. It is God Who justifies each of us - even the best of us. No man can ever boast before God.

Let us be merciful then toward others, who have struggled and failed in life's battles, for we have all failed ourselves too, and we have all received much mercy from God.

Let me say this final word to you, in Jesus' Name:

YOU CAN START FROM WHEREVER YOU ARE AT, RIGHT NOW, AND STILL FULFIL GOD'S PERFECT PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE.

And if you fail tomorrow, go to God immediately in repentance and He will justify you again.

Don't ever say that this gospel won't work for you. If you are tempted to say that, it is because you have listened too long to false teachers, to legalistic preachers and to the devil. Stop listening to them, stop reading their books and listen to God and to His Word from now on. Confess what God's Word says.

May your faith not fail in the moment of testing.

Let us pray for one another, as our Lord does for us.

Amen and Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/the-purpose-of-failure-1-gods-purpose-in-mans-failure/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net