



Theme: Restoration and Renewal – Life and Pandemic

“Failing Forward”

Weekly Memory Verse:

⁹ *“My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.”*—2 Corinthians 12:9

Spiritual Formation and Family Activity Ideas for the Week: Read Psalm 91:1-2. Whether in disappointment, fear, uncertainty or joy, we can be assured God is always with us. Gather as a family in a favorite room in your home. Talk about why that room is a favorite. Is it extra comfortable? Does it have more lighting? Now, move together to the least favorite room in your home (maybe the garage or laundry room). Discuss why it is the least favorite. Is it the dirtiest or the darkest? Return to the comfortable room, talk about where each person experiences God’s presence most deeply. Ask each person to be aware of their most disappointing and their most joyful times this week. Encourage each person to remember God is always present with everyone, everywhere and in every situation. Pray and thank God for always being with you and your family.

Monday, August 16 – Read Psalm 13:1-2, 5. Cleveland Browns founder and coach Paul Brown said, “You can learn a line from a win and a book from a defeat.” Learning from failure or defeat is largely a matter of choice. You probably know people who have stopped reading (or living) today’s passage at verse 2. Concluding that God has stacked life against us does not leave room for growth. God calls us to live into verse 5, trusting God in our times of defeat, pressing on toward the reality of our salvation.




What are some of the larger failures you’ve experienced? At those times, whether past or present, did you struggle with a failure mentality, a sense that things would always stay as painful as they were right then? Or were you (or are you) able to choose to learn one or more life lessons from the failure, asking God to open your eyes to all that God would teach you?




What lessons have you learned from some of life’s failures, large or small? How have those lessons helped you to gain better outcomes, large or small, in their wake? Reflect on ways that you can share these lessons to help others who may be struggling to experience God’s faithful love in difficult times.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to learn from the painful failures I've experienced throughout my life. Let me always experience your faithful love, no matter my circumstances. Amen.


Tuesday, August 17 – Read 1 Timothy 1:12-16 and 2 Corinthians 4:6-10. The apostle Paul was sure of his God-given message, but not egotistical about his own value. In 1 Timothy, he described his regret about his past cruelty toward Christians. He wrote 2 Corinthians after many Corinthian Christians rejected him for teachers Paul called (ironically) the “super apostles” (see 2 Corinthians 11:5). Having his own converts reject him hurt a lot, but Paul did not let it destroy him. In 2 Corinthians 4, he noted that Jesus’ death (which looked like the worst defeat of all) had created the new life Paul and his converts shared.


 Paul knew that neither success nor failure are forever. Scholar N. T. Wright noted on 1 Timothy 1: “God has taken the wildest, most violent of blaspheming persecutors, and has transformed him into not only a believer but also a trusted apostle and evangelist. If God can do that, there is nobody out there, no heart so hard, no anger so bitter, that it remains outside the reach of God’s patient mercy... The passage which seemed to be all about Paul is in reality all about God and his grace and love.” What helps you make your story truly about God, his grace and love?

 Paul said, “we have this treasure in clay pots.” Cheap clay was the disposable houseware of Paul’s day. Scholar Craig Keener wrote, “Corinth produced some of this fragile clay pottery... Greek sources sometimes depict the body as a vessel containing the soul; Paul instead contrasts humanity’s frailty with divine glory.” In what ways have you learned that you are a “clay pot” holding God’s treasure? How can trust in God’s power, not your own, help you to move beyond whatever defeats you suffer in life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have showed endless patience to me, as you did to Paul. By your power, turn my failures into success for your kingdom, as I learn to live out your love and grace. Amen.

Wednesday, August 18 – Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and 12:7-10. Maybe you have heard the phrase, “When the going gets tough; the tough get going!” The going often got tough for the apostle Paul, but he never folded. It’s hard to picture a Roman emperor (or most rulers today) embracing the idea that, “when I’m weak, then I’m strong,” as Paul did in verse 10. But Paul counted on that principle. He wrote earlier in 1 Corinthians 1:25-27 that, “the weakness of God is stronger than human strength...God chose what the world considers weak to shame the strong”.


 Paul stated our faith’s great paradox: The utter and shameful weakness of Jesus dying naked on the cross is a picture of the heart of God who redeems us by carrying the weakness of the world. Does Jesus’ inversion of human power norms make him more appealing to you, or less? How did Jesus’ life and death make real the Bible’s picture of God, maker and ruler of all, as particularly caring for the weak and powerless (see Psalm 82:3-4)?


 Where’s the strength in weakness? Paul nowhere supports weakness of character, however Christ has taken on human weakness but without sin, and his perfect ministry is not without a loving discipline that calls out to “strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees” as we read in Hebrews 12:12. Weakness in this case is an opportunity for faith, not

for self-pity or a victim mentality. In what ways are you letting God's power be "made perfect in weakness"? How can you keep renewing your inner self even when your outer self is hurting or failing?

Prayer: *O God, much as I like feeling powerful, help me see my weaknesses and limitations as gifts. Let Christ's power work through me, turning even my flaws into strengths. Amen.*


Thursday, August 19 – Read 1 John 5:1-5. The conviction John wrote about is not an abstract, sterile belief—it is a living, passionate, active trust that Jesus was and is who he said. That conviction will keep each of us moving toward the kind of life that can defeat all the evil, hatred and negativity in our tired old world.


 1 John 5:4 stated the basis of spiritual success clearly: "this is the victory that has defeated the world: our faith." What helps you, as you train spiritually and work to be God's hands and voice in the world, to keep your trust in God's goodness, not your own?

 On the flip side, we often fear that having too many failures, bad behaviors, or attitudes on our record might make us losers in God's eyes. But if it's true that, "this is the victory that has defeated the world: our faith," then what's the only thing that could block us being successful for God? How can a clearer sense of this free you from obsessive, self-destructive guilt and allow you to live joyfully and gratefully in the light of God's grace?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I believe in and trust you. Even when I'm not sure I do, I'm like the man who cried, "I believe—help my unbelief." Thank you for using my fragile faith as the basis for success in life. Amen.*

Friday, August 20 – Read Revelation 2:8-11. Life is full of obstacles. The church at Smyrna faced intense persecution and hardship, yet the Revelator urged them not to give in, not to quit their faith. In fact, the vision gave all seven churches promises for those who "emerge victorious" (see Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26, 3:5, 12, 21.)

 The persecution the first-century church experienced was far more intense and serious than any of us will ever face. But the principle of not quitting and keeping the faith also applies to our spiritual life. Have there been times when you felt like giving up? What did you do at those times? What was the result?

 God assured believers in Smyrna that, "the crown of life" (the word for an Olympic champion's wreath, that day's gold medal) awaited them. The apostle Paul used the same word. The time of his death was near, he wrote in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, "I have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. At last, the champion's wreath that is awarded for righteousness is waiting for me." How serious are you about never quitting, keeping the faith and ultimately receiving God's great victory?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, provide the strength and resolve for us to never quit in our daily service to you. Help us hold the promise of James 1:12 as a constant reminder to stand firm. Amen.*

Saturday, August 21 – Read Romans 8:31-39. Earlier this week we read Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, "We are experiencing all kinds of trouble, but we aren't crushed. We are confused, but we aren't depressed. We are harassed, but we aren't abandoned. We are

knocked down, but we aren't knocked out." He sent the Romans quite a list of defeats, too: "trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword." But he wasn't whining. He wrote the list to say that he, and we, can defeat all those "defeats": "In all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us" (verse 37). No matter what life throws at us, we can march on with Paul and a long line of believers to God's eternal victory.



Paul asked two insistent questions: "If God is for us, who is against us?" and "Who will separate us from Christ's love?" He phrased both in a way that meant the answer was "Nobody and nothing!" In what ways does that confidence shape your daily life for the better? How can that confidence lead you to sweeping victory beyond all of life's defeats?

Prayer: *All powerful God, whatever comes my way, hold me close in the shelter of your love. Thank you that, through you, I can win a sweeping victory in "all these things." Amen.*