



***Theme: Restoration and Renewal – Live and Pandemic
“Failing Forward”***

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber on...
August 14-15, 2021

Weekly Memory Verse:

⁹ “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.”

–2 Corinthians 12:9

VIDEO Sermon Bumper

SLIDE “Failing Forward”

Several months ago, we planned this new series of sermons that was going to be called, “Life After Pandemic.” We thought it would be a great way to move into the fall this year as it felt like the pandemic was receding. That turned out to not be very good timing on our part! The pandemic had other plans clearly. So, we simply shifted the middle word from “after” to “and.” The truth is that the pandemic is better than it was even though we are dealing with a small resurgence. It’s clear we still have a ways to go and everything we had planned to do in this series of sermons is still very appropriate because we have learned and we have grown and we have been changed. We are different and we are still

people of faith and not people of fear.

How do we live in the midst of a time like this? There have been more deaths related to Covid than all the other combat deaths from all the wars we have fought in the past 120 years. I have known many people whose funerals I have done who died of Covid related causes. There has been much pain in the last year and ½ around loss. The economic impact has been huge, some estimating as much as \$16 trillion over the next 10 years. Some have lost businesses, and some are still struggling with employment realities. Communities like Durango are seeing an influx of people which has changed the real estate dynamic and the ability for many people even live or rent a place which is affordable. Many people's priorities have shifted in life has changed dramatically for some.

Last week, we remembered something developed by Walter Brueggeman, a professor of Old Testament theology at Columbia seminary. He captured the life experience of the Israelites in the Old Testament in a way that resonates with every human because it is our life experience and is especially appropriate and helpful during this time of pandemic. Here is how he describes it.

GRAPHIC Orientation Circle

Orientation is when life is good. In terms of the weather, it's sunny and warm. But that never last forever for anyone. A time of disorientation comes when life gets hard. Eventually, that also subsides, and we have a reorientation for life. That also never last forever and the cycle begins again after the new normal sets in.

GRAPHIC Orientation Doodle

I appreciated this doodle drawing of this cycle. During orientation we, like the Israelites, praise the Lord because God has saved us and made a strong. Then life happens and there is pride, greed, anger, fear, hatred, violence, disappointment, and we cry out to God, "Where are you?" We

are disoriented and confused. Eventually, we experience reorientation when life becomes good again and we again praise the Lord! We experience God's help when we are weak, and we trust in God again! After we settled into that time of reorientation, we move through the cycle again.

GRAPHIC Orientation Circle with RED X just after disorientation

I think we are today on this graphic just after disorientation and moving towards reorientation in some form. We have started to make that turn and we are hopeful that we can see a light. We begin to feel hope already, but I also remind us that this is a marathon and Sprint when it comes to working for something like a pandemic. Even though we are not clearly out of the woods yet, we know that Sunday is coming.

Today I want us to focus on something that happens to ALL of us in times of disorientation and it's something we MUST recognize before we ever find reorientation.

SLIDE During disorientation we fail.

Think of it like riding a bike. To learn how to ride a bike we must consciously put ourselves in a place of disorientation as we don't grow up riding a bike. What happens when 99 percent of us try to learn to ride a bike? We fall and we fall. If we are not willing to fall or fail, we will NEVER learn to ride a bike. During this pandemic, each one of us has failed at something. We fail to wear a mask at the right time, or wrong time. We make a mistake on Zoom and leave the camera and audio up when we use the restroom. Mike Polk Jr. is a commentator who had a great take on this.

VIDEO

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zBrSPcYuG8&ab_channel=WKYCChannel3 (00:32 to 02:26)

We have failed as a church at times trying to do worship online or, for some, changing up the sanctuary seating, or worship times, or whatever it may be. Can we all agree that we have failed, and we will fail at some point in our future? The real challenge is when we think we have not failed, or should not fail, even though it is inevitable in times of disorientation. I would argue that we will NEVER reach reorientation or a new normal WITHOUT failure. So, let's do some therapy together. Say this with me out loud.

SLIDE I have failed.

SLIDE I have messed up.

SLIDE And God still loves me!

Please don't look at the person next to you and point a finger at them because this is our human condition—all of us! We ALL mess up and fall short. We all say things we wish we had not said and do things we wish we had not done, and sometimes those are on Zoom and end up on the web forever! What really counts is not our failures, but what we do AFTER we fail. It really is what we do after we get back up that counts, and helps us fail forward, moving in a direction that can take us towards reorientation. The truth is that if we don't want to fail, we're in trouble in life. If we live in fear of failure or things not working out perfectly in life, we will never actually do anything! Listen to some of these stats.

SLIDE (FLY IN ONE AT A TIME)

Automobiles cause 20% of all fatal accidents

Air, rail, and watercraft cause 16% of all accidents

15% of all accidents occur walking down the street!

Don't stay at home - 17% of all accidents happen there!

You will be pleased to learn that only .001% of all deaths occur in worship services in church, and these are usually related to previous physical ailments. Therefore, logic tells us that the safest place for you to be at any given point in time is at church! Bible study is safe also. The percentage of deaths during Bible study is even less.

SLIDE FOR SAFETY'S SAKE - Attend Worship and Read Your Bible ...

(FLY IN)

IT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE!

One of my favorite movies of all times is, "Chariots of Fire." It's a great film, with such a great story to remember as the Olympics have come to a close this past week. Eric Liddell is a Scottish runner who is lightning fast. In order to qualify for his event in the Olympics, he had to win his preliminary heat. His opponents knew that the only way to beat him, was to knock him down so he wouldn't get back up. Let's see what happens...

VIDEO "Chariots of Fire"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4e5Xfmc8zQ&ab_channel=ledies (00:12 to 01:34 AND 01:50 to 02:10)

I love that quote at the end, "***Well, it wasn't the prettiest quarter of a mile, but it sure was the bravest.***" No matter who you are, you have, are in the midst of and/or will fail. It's one of the hazards of being human. I would suggest to you today that the most critical part of failing what we do after we get up. What you do AFTER you have fallen and after we get up is what eventually gets us out of disorientation and moving towards reorientation and into life. The first thing I believe we have to do is just what Eric Liddell did.

SLIDE We get up and do not give up.

This may be the most difficult step really, because let's face it, when

we've been knocked down, sometimes the easiest thing to do is stay down there and take a nap! While a nap might be needed for a while, we can't stay down. Consider the man who lost 14 public elections before he finally won the presidency, Abraham Lincoln. Horace Greeley, no admirer of Abraham Lincoln in his lifetime, wrote these words about him after Lincoln died:

"He was not born king of men --- but a child of the people, who made himself a great persuader, therefore a leader, by dint of firm resolve, patient effort, and dogged perseverance. He slowly won his way to eminence and fame by doing the work that lay next to him---doing it with all his growing might---doing it as well as he could, and learning by his failure, when failure was encountered, how to do it better.... He was open to all impressions and influences, and gladly profited by the teachings of events and circumstances, no matter how adverse or unwelcome. There was probably no year of his life when he was not a wiser, cooler and better man than he had been the year preceding."

The people of Israel are a great example of getting up when they have fallen. They often found themselves in slavery, or bondage, or wandering in the wilderness. The people were tired and weary and out of energy. But the prophet Isaiah encourages the people with these words in chapter 40.

BIBLE

***1 "Comfort, comfort my people,"
says your God.***

***2 "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.
Tell her that her sad days are gone
and her sins are pardoned.***

BIBLE

**²⁸ Have you never heard?
Have you never understood?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of all the earth.
He never grows weak or weary.
No one can measure the depths of his understanding.**

**²⁹ He gives power to the weak
and strength to the powerless.**

**³⁰ Even youths will become weak and tired,
and young men will fall in exhaustion.**

**³¹ But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength.
They will soar high on wings like eagles.
They will run and not grow weary.
They will walk and not faint.**

God promises to be with us and give us strength, even when we feel we can go no farther. So, when we've fallen and feel we can't get up, we can turn to Isaiah 40 and be assured that God will help us to soar once again. Our task is simply to get up and keep moving. Sometimes it is just one tiny step that begins the road to new life we cannot even imagine. President Calvin Coolidge once said these powerful words:

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful [people] with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.

I would have to disagree a bit with that last statement. Persistence is important, but it is not the ONLY key to success. I believe we do need persistence, but we need something more added to it. There is an old saying about boxers: A champion gets up one more time than they get knocked down. Yet if that's the ONLY thing they do, they may finally win,

but not before getting the snot beat out of them! Who wants that? That boxer will do much better in the long run if they only have to get up a few times. We do that by using our HEAD with your HEART.

SLIDE We use our head AND our heart.

As one of my mentors used to say to me when I was about to make a bad decision and asking for his advice, “Don’t be an idiot!” Getting up after we’ve fallen AND staying up, takes persistence AND common sense. I remember as a kid playing basketball in the back yard with my uncle and my cousins. My uncle was older and slower than me, but he was smarter. I really appreciate that these days! One of my uncle Jim’s favorite moves was to head fake one way, so he got you in the air, then easily dribble around you for a lay-up. After beating me on that move several times he said, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on...me. Fool me three times, and you’re in real trouble!”

The scriptures teach us this in Proverbs 9:12.

BIBLE

¹² If you become wise, you will be the one to benefit.

If you scorn wisdom, you will be the one to suffer.

Milton Bradley is a case in point. He figured out what he needed to do so that he wouldn’t keep on failing. In 1860 he had earned enough money to buy a printing press and go into business for himself as a lithographer. His first great product idea was for a lithograph of newly elected president Abraham Lincoln. As soon as he offered the print for sale, the orders flooded in; but then they all canceled with a few days even though he had used all of his resources to print up the orders. What happened, why did the orders cancel? Anyone know the answer to Milton Bradley’s first great failure? I’ll show you the image and see if you can guess.

GRAPHIC Milton Bradley's Abraham Lincoln Lithograph

Bradley's print was of a clean-shaven Lincoln, but the new president had grown a beard! Oops! So, what did Milton do? He could have wallowed in his pity, but instead he remembered as a child a game that his parents used to play with him. From that he had a concept for a game he called the Checkered Game of Life, which taught moral values. He designed and printed the game with what he had left in his savings. It was the first parlor game in the US and in that first year he sold forty thousand copies! As many as he could print!

That success gave Bradley a new direction in life. He wanted to produce games and other materials that would stimulate the mind and influence people's thinking while entertaining them. Mostly that meant making games, but it wasn't long before Milton Bradley wanted to branch out into educational resources. He had heard about a new concept to America that had come across the Atlantic from Germany called... kindergarten. Bradley wanted to be the first person to print the material in English, but his board of directors said no way. Even though he founded the company, his business associate insisted it was foolish.

So, Bradley went off on his own, pushing his plan forward and ultimately achieved remarkable success and made an enormous impact on generations of American children by producing building blocks, art supplies and printed curriculum for kindergarten. Bradley would write about this time in his life...

"It took all the faith I could muster," said Bradley, "all the belief in the final triumph of kindergarten principles to pull me through those early years of discouragement, when my business associates and other friends and the annual balance sheets of our bookkeeper were all against me."

Bradley's story is important for us today because his greatest

successes ended coming out of the American Civil War, the great depression of the 1870s and it set up his company to not only survive but thrive during World War 2 and the Great Depression as the produced simple, inexpensive games for soldiers to play on the battlefield and children to play in the classroom.

Using our head AND heart is still just part of the equation. I have often told you as our pastor that when people use the argument against religion or faith that it is a crutch, to go ahead and agree with them! No need to argue, because when we break our leg, we need a crutch, and when we have a broken heart, we need even more.

SLIDE We turn to God for strength when we fail.

Here is what I have seen in life for myself and others when it comes to failure in times of disorientation. Failure can push us towards God. If we want to complete a journey, we must take a first step. We start moving our legs towards that goal and know that God goes with us. During Lincoln's tenure as president, he was visited by a guest who sought to flatter him by saying, "Back in my home state people say the welfare of the nation depends on God and Abraham Lincoln." Humbly, Lincoln responded,

SLIDE *"You are half right. Without divine assistance I cannot succeed. With it I cannot fail."* – Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln's attitude was greatly influenced by reading the New Testament Letters of the Apostle Paul. If you remember Paul's story, he originally was Saul, a Jew who worked for the Roman government seeking out Christians and putting them to death. Then Saul had an experience where he met the risen Christ, and he was converted and changed his name to Paul. Paul joined forces with the disciples and because of him and his work the Good News of Jesus Christ was spread throughout Greece and Turkey, what was called Asia Minor in the first century. Many non-

Jews came to know Christ through his work and because of the churches he started.

But Paul's work was not all success. As a matter of fact, most of his letters we have in Scripture were written from prison and written to try and fix broken churches that he had started! My guess is that if you had met Paul when he was alive, you might have figured he was a failure. He spent many years in prison, the churches he founded struggled, and he had a severe physical problem that we read about in 2 Corinthians 12, starting in verse 7b.

BIBLE

So, to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.

⁸ Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

What do you suppose Paul meant by these words? Could it be that when we fail, God will use our failures to help us get back up? Could it be that in our weakness is where we will find strength and where we will see God at work? For Paul this was clearly the case. Even though others in the world might view his life as a failure, God's will was being done through his life. This is the nature of failing forward. This is why it's so important to **Get Up and not give up; use our Head AND our Heart; and turn to God for STRENGTH** when we fail. This is how we continue moving from disorientation to orientation.

One of my mentors told me a true story about a minister during the great depression whose led a church that was in serious financial troubles. One day, while checking the church storeroom, the minister discovered several cartons of new bibles that had never been opened and distributed. So, at his Sunday sermon, he asked for three volunteers from the congregation who would be willing to sell the bibles door-to-door for \$10. each to raise the desperately needed money for the church.

Peter, Paul, and Louie all raised their hands to volunteer for the task. The reverend knew that Peter and Paul earned their living as salesmen and were likely capable of selling some Bibles, but he had serious doubts about Louie. Louie was a local farmer who had always tended to keep to himself because he was embarrassed by his speech impediment. Louie stuttered very badly, but not wanting to discourage him, the minister decided to let him try anyway. He sent the three of them away with the back seat of their cars stacked with bibles and asked them to meet with him and report the results of their door-to-door selling efforts the following Sunday which they did.

Anxious to find out how successful they were, the reverend immediately asked Peter, "Well, Peter, how did you make out selling our bibles last week?" Proudly handing the reverend an envelope, Peter replied, "Pastor, using my sales prowess, I was able to sell 20 bibles, and here's the 200 dollars I collected on behalf of the church."

"Great job, Peter!" The minister said, vigorously shaking his hand. "You are indeed a fine salesman, and the Church is indebted to you."

Turning to Paul, he asked, "And Paul, how many bibles did you manage to sell for the church last week?"

Paul, smiling and sticking out his chest, confidently replied, "Pastor, I am a professional salesman and was happy to give the church the benefit of my sales expertise. Last week I sold 28 bibles on behalf of the church,

and here's the 280 dollars I collected.”

The minister responded, “That's absolutely splendid, Paul. You are truly a professional salesman, and the church is also indebted to you.”

Apprehensively, the minister turned to Louie and said, “And Louie, did you manage to sell any bibles last week?”

Louie silently offered the pastor a large envelope. The minister opened it and counted the contents.

“What is this?!” the minister exclaimed. “Louie, there's 3200 dollars in here! Are you suggesting that you sold 320 bibles for the church, door to door, in just one week?”

Louie just nodded.

“That's impossible!” both Peter and Paul said in unison. “We are professional salesmen, yet you claim to have sold 10 times as many bibles as we could?”

“Yes, this does seem unlikely,” the minister agreed. “I think you'd better explain how you managed to do accomplish this, Louie.”

Louie shrugged. “I-I-I- re-re-really do-do-don't kn-kn-know f-f-f-for sh-sh-sh-sure,” he stammered.

Impatiently, Peter interrupted. “For crying out loud, Louie, just tell us what you said to them when they answered the door!”

“A-a-a-all I-I-I s-s-said wa-wa-was,” Louis replied, “W-w-w-w-would y-y-y-you I-I-I-I-I-like t-t-to b-b-b-buy th-th-th-this b-b-b-b-bible f-f-for t-t-ten b-b-b-bucks ---o-o-o-or--- wo-wo-would yo-you j-j-j-just I-like m-m-me t-t-to st-st-stand h-h-here and r-r-r-r-r-read it t-to y-y-you?”

You see folks, God’s power and strength is perfected in our weaknesses. What we sometimes in the world things of as failures are what God can use to change the world. This is the beauty of the Christian

faith, that it does not rely on perfection, but it relies on us being faithful and being on our way to perfection. The reality of these times of disorientation is that we will fail. God does not promise, nor does God desire for us to be perfect. Not one of us will achieve perfection in this life, but by the grace of God we can move towards God's desired picture of the future—a new reorientation that is the Kingdom of God, where our weakness and imperfection is a gift God uses; if we **Get Up and not give up; use our Head AND our Heart; and turn to God for STRENGTH remembering that in our weakness God can do some amazing work.**

Let's pray...

SLIDE **Prayer**

Dear God, during these times of uncertainty, help us to remember that we will fail and sometimes life gets messy. This is part of what it means to be human because we are not perfect. May we be honest about those failures and times we fall short, even when we don't do it deliberately. Give us patient hearts for others and for ourselves. When we fall, give us strength to get back up. Give us wisdom to learn from those failures and may we always hold onto the truth that it is in those moments of failure, messiness, and weakness you can make us strong. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen

August 14-15 Order

1. Ely Welcomes people
2. Two Songs, followed by prayer and Lord's Prayer
3. Welcome and invite people to wave and be seated.
4. Invite children to go to Summit Kids.
5. Connect bag.
6. Announcements by Jeff (Check News Section on Website)
 - Offering Baskets at tables again
 - Spreading out and wearing masks
 - River Baptism Service
 - Backpack and Key Blessing
7. Invite congregation to prepare their hearts for the message.
8. Video bumper plays.
9. Sermon
10. Prayer after sermon
11. 1 Song of Worship
12. Prayer
13. Meditation Moments reminder by Jeff
14. Offering Focus – Eagle Lake Camp
15. Closing Prayer