

“Getting Unstuck So We Can Live Free!”

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“Getting Unstuck From Not Learning From Past Mistakes”

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Key Texts: James 1:21-25

Proverbs 26:11-12

I. Introduction: “To Err is Human”

If you had to count on your fingers how many mistakes you have ever made in your life, how many fingers would you hold up? One hand, two hands? Need to add your toes?

The point is, we’ve all messed up, made mistakes, and failed at things more times than we’d ever like to admit.

We’ve all heard and used phrases such as, “To err is human”, “I’m not perfect”, “You live and learn”. All these have some truth to them. The real danger comes if we do make mistakes and fail to learn from those mistakes. When we do, it’s like the proverb says, “As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool returns to his folly”. That’s the last time I’ll mention that proverb, but it sure leaves an image in the mind. When we make mistakes, wrong choices, when we sin, God still loves us. God also expects us to learn and grow and improve ourselves because God’s end goal for us is to become like Jesus. You might think, “Well, I have a long way to go pastor!” And everyone around you, including me would echo that with an “Amen, you sure do. And so do I!”

II. Thoughts on Learning From Our Failures

Winston Churchill said, “Success is not final, failure is not fatal, it is the courage to continue that counts.” It’s not allowing ourselves to get stuck.

C. S. Lewis said, “Failures are finger posts on the way to success.”

And Teddy Roosevelt, past President of the United States, said, “The only person who never makes a mistake is the one who never does anything.”

You know there are some other things that keep people stuck.

---Believing you have to please everyone.

---Believing you have to spend time with people who are not healthy for you.

---Believing you have to have a college education to be successful.

---Believing you have to follow the crowd.

---Believing you can’t pursue your dreams.

And often we stay stuck in some of these places because we fail to learn from our past mistakes. We keep trying to please everyone. We stay in unhealthy relationships and just keep repeating the same bad habits, things don’t work out the first time as we pursued a dream, so we give up.

III. Putting Into Practice What We Hear

And in some cases, it does go as deep as what James says. We are stuck because of allowing some of the moral filth into our lives and we fail to incorporate God’s Word and truth into our lives. We listen to the Word, thinking our hearing is good enough and therefore we deceive ourselves—we lie to ourselves or trick ourselves into believing that’s all I need. James says we have to “put into practice what we hear”. If we want to get unstuck so we can live freely we have to take an honest look at ourselves in the mirror and make a choice to live and look like Jesus in our living, our language, and our moral character. It’s looking into the perfect law

of loving God, loving our neighbors and loving our enemies that gives us freedom. And the promise is, if we do, we will be blessed.

You know, I wish I could be what God wants me to be all the time. I realize I cannot. That should not give me an excuse not to learn from my mistakes or my sins, repent of them and then get back up and work on being a better person, or pastor, or spouse, or parent.

IV. Our Mistakes Are Gifts That Can Be Stepping Stones

Lisabeth Saunders Medlock, PhD says, “Our mistakes are gifts, gems, guide posts in our learning and growth as people...which teach us powerful lessons”.

Pastor John Maxwell has taught many pastors and business leaders key principals for leading groups, churches and organizations effectively.

As a young pastor, I read every book, listened to every tape, attended conferences and had church leaders do training on “Developing the Leader Within”, “Laws of Teamwork”, and “Laws of Leadership”. Then he wrote a book called Failing Forward: Turning Mistakes into Stepping Stones for Success.

This material and insights and lessons provide a way for any of us to learn and grow and to get unstuck, if we are willing to learn from our past mistakes and not keep going back like the..., well you know.

Shane Hedrick sent me these pictures of this box turtle who, as it moved forward, had some hurdles to get over. What’s the hurdle you know you need to get over in order to move forward and to get unstuck?

One of the lessons I learned from Maxwell is that “many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.”

V. Paul’s Struggles

If you can change the way you view failure, you can change the way you run your race and you can actually gain the strength from God to keep running your race.

We read this text at funerals. Maybe we need to be thinking of it before that day comes. When Paul, as a mentor, is talking to young Timothy I’m sure he thinks back on those times when he messed up. “The things I know I should do, I don’t do. The things I know I shouldn’t do, I do.” (Romans 2:15-20)

Paul understood there was sin living in him. We are all prone to wonder and leave the God we say we love. We all have this desire and good intentions to do good, but have a difficult time carrying it out. It is the same thing James is saying. We listen to the Word, we know the Word, but we, after looking in the mirror, walk away and forget what we look like, or who—Jesus—we are to look like. The battle is with the sin that lives within us. That’s what serves to keep us stuck. And if we can get a change in perspective on that and then we can rise above our sin, mistakes, and failures then only God knows the good that can come of that in all aspects of our living and in the journey of faith we are on.

Let’s not forget what we’ve learned, what we’ve heard. Let’s do it and God promises we’ll be blessed.

After all that Paul went through as a disciple. His struggles with sin, his weaknesses, ultimately his moving forward the cause of Christ, he being close to death, tells Timothy in II Timothy 6:6-8. “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith”. And because of that Paul believed and knew, “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will award me on that day. And not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearing.”

Do you believe that? Do you know that? Have you given up on your race in life? Are you stuck and can't find a way to move on? To move forward? To fail forward?

VI. God's Word a Source of Renewal and Hope

You know what I find works when I feel stuck, or am struggling or feeling defeated? Taking time to read and study God's word is one thing. Getting my focus off myself and my problems is really helpful, too. I do that when I read God's word, when I worship God rather in nature or in this sanctuary, and when I reach out to others in need and when I choose to serve.

Sometimes your flesh is so tired, you've stayed in that same old routine, you've gotten trapped in that cycle over and over and over again. You know you are "in" over your head. You feel like you're drowning. And here I am telling you to pick up your Bible and start reading and studying, that's the last thing you feel like doing, right? You'd rather watch the news, a game show, or sporting event. Just know this. There is nothing better than to wash, cleanse, refresh, renew, and revive your inner person, than to soak yourself in God's Word.

Sometimes mere moments in God's Word can cleanse away hours of pollution that has built up in my mind and my soul that keeps me from swimming in cleaner and clearer waters.

VII. What Is It You Really Want?

Here is a truth about ourselves. "We as people make time for what is important to us. We seem to always afford time and energy into what we really want."

What is it you really want? Do you want to stay stuck? Or, do you want to run your race well and, like Paul, finish well? Whatever it is you are into right now, learn lessons from your past failures and mistakes and use that to finish well. Don't look into the mirror and then walk away and forget. Put into practice what you hear and know to do.

VIII. Hitting a Second Ball

Last Thursday a week, Lee Anne's and my 32nd anniversary, she was at the Writers and Speakers Conference in North Carolina. She had a fantastic experience. Josh took me out in the afternoon to play golf. It was just for fun, not many people on the course, so occasionally, ok—more often than not, I'd hit a bad shot. I'd say to Josh, "Hey, I'm going to hit a second ball, just to see if I learned anything". Guess what? About 80% of the time, not always, but almost always, when I hit that second ball I improved immensely. It became a joke as I said, "Hey, there's a good sermon illustration".

If we are afraid to do or try anything, if we are afraid to take a risk, if we are afraid to take a second shot, we'll stay stuck and never learn and grow.

And adding God's Word into the mix will only serve to give you a great tool to lift you up to a better place and get you over your hurdle. And small groups are about to begin for the fall. Pastor Lauren will invite you to begin signing up next week.

Get this picture. Tell yourself, "I'm not a failure. I failed at doing something." That's a big difference. Failing is a momentary event, not a lifelong epidemic.

IX. Peter's Lesson in Failing

Peter is probably our most classic example, besides for Judas who betrayed Jesus, of a disciple who failed miserably. There are several times Peter let Jesus down. None more penetrating than when he denied knowing Jesus not once, not twice, but three times. Scripture says after that third time, Peter ran out of the

courtyard and wept bitterly. He knew what he had done. He failed miserably. We all have likely failed at something or with someone miserably. Disappointment, pain, rejection are likely all part of the equation.

Have you added Jesus to your equation? A day would come when Peter and Jesus would meet up again. It was their one on one moment of reconciliation and forgiveness like we talked about last week. “Peter, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord, you know I do!” Not once, not twice, but three times.

And Peter would move past that huge hurdle, learn from his mistake and failure, to be the one whom Jesus would build his church on.

If that could happen for Peter, what could happen for you or me? Sometimes you just have to drop that second ball and try again.

X. Closing Prayer

Let us Pray:

Loving, Gracious, Forgiving Christ, Thank you that even when we fail, or sin, or mess up those are not places we have to stay in, or live in, or that have to define who we are. You always give us a future and a hope. Help us, like Paul and Peter to learn from our mistakes, just like so many others have and, yes, even in these moments as we come to Your table, redeem us, renew us, and help us not only find hope and healing in your written Word, the Bible, but also in Your Word—Jesus—made flesh, who has come to live among us. Be present at our Table Lord.

Amen.