

# SESSION 4

# MOVE BEYOND FAILURE



*What are some ways our culture responds to failure?*

**QUESTION #1**

#BSFLBeStrong

## THE POINT

*Leaders confront failure, deal with it, and move forward.*



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

The man often lauded as the best basketball player of all time was cut from his high school basketball team. But Michael Jordan didn't let that setback stop him from playing the game. He later said: "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot, and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."<sup>1</sup>

That's good advice for many areas of life, but what about when it's more than just a missed basket or an error in judgment? What about when we fail spiritually?

The failures we see in the Bible—pictures of sin against God—teach us more than just to be resilient or to get back on the horse when it throws us off. We can't simply correct those kinds of failures; only God can remove our sin. But as we will see in the Book of Joshua, God calls us to confront our sin, deal with it, and move forward.

In other words, sin and failure should never have the final say.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## **Joshua 7:13-15,19-21,25-26; 8:1** (NIV)

**7:13** “Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, ‘Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There are devoted things among you, Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them.

**14** “In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe the LORD chooses shall come forward clan by clan; the clan the LORD chooses shall come forward family by family; and the family the LORD chooses shall come forward man by man.

**15** Whoever is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the LORD and has done an outrageous thing in Israel!”

**7:19** Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and honor him. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.”

**20** Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done:

**21** When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

**7:25** Joshua said, “Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today.” Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them.

**26** Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.

**8:1** Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land.”

### **Outrageous thing** (7:15)—

The Hebrew term *nebalah* refers to any senseless, foolish, or disgraceful action. In Achan’s case, his foolish act was in direct defiance of God’s command.

**Shekels** (7:21)—A standard unit of measure which came to be associated with money through the weighing of gold and silver. Two hundred shekels would equate to about five pounds of silver.

**Fierce anger** (7:26)—In our context, the phrase refers to God’s righteous indignation against Achan’s possession of banned items in blatant violation of His expressed prohibition.



**What's your initial reaction to these verses?**

**QUESTION #2****Joshua 7:13-15**

Once Jericho was conquered, Joshua set the people's sights on the town of Ai (pronounced "AY-eye"). The men Joshua sent to scout the area reported that Ai would be an easy conquest because of its size (see 7:3). So, Joshua confidently sent what he considered to be a sufficient number of soldiers to conquer the city. To everyone's surprise, however, those soldiers were sent running! Joshua and the other leaders were so devastated by the defeat that they even questioned God's plan from the beginning. Joshua asked God, "Why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan?" (v. 7).

God showed Joshua that the source of Israel's military failure was one man's spiritual rebellion. Earlier, God had made it clear that the Israelites were to take no spoil from the city of Jericho (see 6:17-19). Everything in that city represented the sin of the land—sin God wanted to purify in the midst of His people. But one man had rejected God's command and taken certain items from the city.

To get to the bottom of this rebellion, God commanded the people to "consecrate" themselves—to prepare themselves for dealing with the sin that threatened their mission. This sin was a failure, but it wasn't a simple error or mistake. It was intentional, and God would not tolerate such a transgression. He warned that He would not go any further with the Israelites until they dealt with the sin amongst them (see 7:12). One man's sin was an "outrageous thing in Israel," damaging to the spiritual life of the entire nation.

How do we identify sin and failure in our own lives? For Joshua, God Himself exposed what was hidden. We should pray and ask God to do the same for us. Ask Him to bring to light our sins, awaken us to what has lulled us to sleep, and turn our hearts from anything that steers us away from allegiance to Him.

## Joshua 7:19-21

God supernaturally revealed who was responsible for stealing and deceiving others by going tribe by tribe, clan by clan, and family by family (see 7:16-18). Why didn't God just immediately identify Achan as the one who had sinned? Perhaps because this was more than one man's sin. Only one man took the items, yes, but the sin affected all the Israelites, so God wanted each person to examine his or her heart. This process also gave the guilty party an opportunity to step forward and freely confess his or her transgression.

Achan did not step forward voluntarily, but through God's process of elimination, he ultimately had no choice but to admit his guilt. Joshua confronted him directly, giving him the opportunity to respond and confess what he had done. Joshua commanded Achan to "give glory to the LORD" (v. 19). Achan had failed to give glory to God when he took the items; he essentially took glory for himself. By admitting what he had done, Achan returned the glory he should never have stolen in the first place. Unfortunately, this was not a confession tied to repentance. Achan only confessed when he was forced to. There is no evidence of genuine remorse.

An unrepentant person:

- ▶ is concerned only about the consequences of sin.
- ▶ tends to deal in generalities when confessing sin.
- ▶ is sorry he or she got caught.

In contrast, a broken and repentant person:

- ▶ is grieved over the root of his or her sin.
- ▶ acknowledges specifics when confessing sin.
- ▶ is genuinely sorry for his or her sin and turns away from it.<sup>2</sup>

*Why is confession a necessary step for moving beyond failure?*

### QUESTION #3



## Joshua 7:25-26; 8:1

The story doesn't end well for Achan and his family. In fact, the ending often shocks modern readers. Ultimately, Achan's story is a stark reminder of the serious nature of sin.

Remember, this wasn't just Achan's sin. In God's eyes, Achan's transgression left a stain on the entire Israelite community (see 7:11). As long as they allowed this sin to remain in their midst, it was their sin also. That's why it was necessary for Joshua to lead the community to confront that sin and deal with it, which they did.

I'm grateful for the hopeful picture of the gospel spelled out in this dark story. Because the Israelites obeyed God and removed the sin from among them, God forgave His people and called them to move forward again in the quest to enter the promised land. Their mission was again in clear focus as their heavenly Father restored the confidence that sin had obliterated.

Do you see the connection to the gospel? Sinners like us, with our many spiritual failures, deserve death—we deserve the same sentence Achan received. It's only through Jesus and the cross that justice can be done *and* we can live in holiness. We were guilty and deserving of death, but our punishment was laid on Jesus at the cross, not on us. He took our sin and punishment, and in their place He gave us His holiness. This transfer happens for all who turn from their sin and trust His work on their behalf.

You may fail over and over, but in Christ you will always find the grace to begin again. Don't let past sin and failure define your character. **Go to God with your sin, turn from it, accept His forgiveness, and get back to doing what He wants you to do.**

Choose to live in the forgiveness and grace of God—and lead others to do the same.

*This passage focuses on Israel's failure as an entire community. How does that knowledge impact your understanding of these verses?*

### QUESTION #4

*How do we keep the focus on moving forward as we deal with sin and failure?*

### QUESTION #5

## WHEN I FAIL

*Which of the following images best captures your immediate reaction when you fail at something or fall short of a goal?*



*How do you wish you could respond to failure?*

A large, empty rectangular area with a light yellow background, intended for a handwritten response to the question above.

*"Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently."*

—HENRY FORD

## LIVE IT OUT

What steps will you take to confront sin and move forward with God? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Practice personal confession.** Begin the discipline of examining your heart each day and confessing all known sin.
- ▶ **Practice confession in community.** James 5:16 commands us to confess our sins to one another. Find a group or an individual to whom you can safely talk about your struggles, offer encouragement, and seek repentance.
- ▶ **Confront in love.** As you see sin and failure in those you lead, lovingly talk to them about it. Godly leadership means we strive to help others come to a deeper walk with Christ.



You will continue to fail both practically and spiritually throughout your life. But you are not a failure in God's eyes. Let His forgiveness have the final say—then move forward.

## The Fear of Failure



*As I write this, I am reminded of the times when I was most afraid of failure. The first was my last year in seminary. I had spent four years in college and four years in graduate seminary training, and within weeks I would have to step out of that comfort zone into the real world. I remember thinking, I wonder if I'll be able to do this. What if I'm just not cut out for the ministry?*

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