

ESF Lord's Day service message

2/9/2025

Growing Through Failure

Luke 5:1-11

¹ One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God, ² he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Abraham Lincoln has been known as the greatest leader in US history. But his life was not a series of successes but a series of failures. His family was very poor, and his mom died when he was nine. So, he could not have formal education as other kids did. At twenty-two, he lost his job as a store clerk. He wanted to go to law school, but his education

wasn't good enough. At twenty-six, his business partner died, leaving him a huge debt that took years to repay. At twenty-eight, after dating a girl for four years, he asked her to marry him. She said no. He ran for the Congress twice but failed. At thirty-seven, on his third try, he was elected to Congress. But two years later, he failed to be reelected. At forty-five, he ran for the Senate and lost. At forty-seven, he failed as the vice-presidential candidate. At forty-nine, he ran for the Senate again and lost.

If he had given up on himself in those failures, he would have become nobody. But he did not give up. He took all those failures as opportunities to grow and to build up his character. At fifty-one, he was elected to the president of the United States. (What made him great was not series of success but the series of failures)

Failure is a part of our lives. We all experience failures. By how we deal with our failures we can either get depressed and backslide or we can learn a positive lesson, grow, and accomplish noble goals. Here with this word, Jesus teaches us how to learn positive lessons and grow through our failures.

Receive comfort in God's presence

Simon was a professional fisherman. Fishing was his only job, an everyday job. But one day he was not able to catch any fish although he worked very hard. He failed that day. He was tired and discouraged.

At that time, Jesus came to him. What Simon needed was some word of encouragement regarding fishing. But Jesus did not say anything about fishing. Jesus just got into Simon's boat, asked him to put his boat out and let him use the boat to teach the crowd on the beach. What Jesus asked Simon to do was nothing to do with fishing.

Was Jesus insensitive to Simon's need? No! He knew what was going on in Simon's mind. Was Jesus concerned with Simon while he taught

the many people on the beach? Yes, Jesus cared for the one individual, Simon while he was teaching the crowd.

Then why didn't Jesus say anything about fishing to Simon at the time? Because Jesus had a better plan for Simon. While Jesus was using Simon's boat to teach the crowd, Jesus let Simon stay close to Him. By doing so, Jesus helped Simon meet the God in Him personally. And God's intimate presence gave Simon great comfort.

When we meet God's presence personally, we receive comfort that enables us to overcome all problems.

When Isaiah got depressed because of the hopeless political and social situation of his day and needed comfort and encouragement, God did not say to Isaiah anything about political or social issues. God revealed his holy presence to Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1-3. ¹ *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne, and the train of his robe filled the temple.* ² *Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: ...* ³ *And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."*

As Isaiah encountered God's holy presence, the problems around him became nothing.

At Jesus' crucifixion and death on the cross, all his disciples failed him. They could not keep the faith. They did not pray, as they should have. Peter even denied Jesus publicly. They went back to their hometown as failures. In their failure, they got depressed and felt hopeless. They tried to go back to their fishing business. It was the only job they could think about and do at that moment. However, they were not able to catch fish at all. They became more depressed.

Then the risen Lord Jesus came to them and helped them to catch fish. But more importantly, Jesus also shared intimate and personal time with them. His presence itself gave great comfort to them (John 21:1-14).

When we fail in certain areas in our lives and get depressed, what we need most is nothing but God's presence. That is the key to finding comfort and encouragement. God wants us to learn that truth through our failure.

When you get depressed in failure, believe that the Lord of comfort is always near you. Believe that what you need most is God's intimate and personal presence in you. When God wants to be near you with His holy presence, He may ask you to do some small tasks for Him as He did with Simon. He may ask you to give a little bit of time to serve Him. He may ask you to give something you have to take care of His ministry and mission. He does that to help you turn your concerns from yourself to Himself.

Do not hesitate to do as He says. That is an opportunity to see God's presence and to have a personal relationship with Him. Then you will receive the comfort you need at the time of failure.

Do whatever the Lord tells you to do

After teaching the crowd from Simon's boat, Jesus commanded Simon to put his boat out into deep water and let down his net. However, this command was difficult for Peter to understand.

Simon was a professional fisherman. He was born and raised in a fishing village. He was an uneducated person. He did not have the knowledge educated people had. But he knew about fishing. He knew when to fish, where to fish and how to fish. According to his experience and knowledge about fishing, it was not the right time and place for fishing.

But through his failure Simon was broken and humble. Through failure Simon realized that there are things in life which are far beyond his control. He realized that his fishing business cannot be always under his control. So, he became humble and obedient.

Usually when things go well, we tend to listen to nobody. When we can deal with our problems and overcome them and be successful by our own efforts and wisdom, we do not seek God's help. We are proud of who we are or what we can accomplish.

But when we fail and see the limits of our ability we are broken and humble. When we are broken and humble in our failures and ready to listen to God, God speaks to us.

So, although Simon did not understand why Jesus told him to do that, he decided to obey. He said, "*Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets. (Verse 5).*" He went to the deep water and threw out his net as Jesus said.

And a miracle happened. Suddenly the net was full of fish.

Such a blessing can happen in our lives too. When we are broken because of our failures, the Lord may command us to do something we do not understand. But when we obey his word, He helps us to overcome our failures miraculously.

There was a man who was struggling with his physical weakness. One night while he was sleeping in his cabin suddenly his room was filled with light. He heard the voice of the Lord who told him to look outside through a window. He saw a large rock in front of his cabin. The Lord told him to keep pushing against the rock with all his might.

This the man did, day after day. For many years he toiled to push the

rock with all his might. But the rock did not move at all. Each time the man returned to his cabin sore and worn out. He felt that his effort of pushing the rock ended in vain.

Finally he thought that the task was impossible and that he was a failure. One day he took his troubled thoughts to the Lord in prayer. “Lord, I have labored long and hard to obey your word. I have put all my strength into doing what you have asked. Yet, after all this time, I have not moved that rock even half a millimeter. What is wrong? Why am I failing?”

The Lord responded, “Son, when I asked you to do this, I told you that your task was to push against the rock with all your strength, which you have done. I never told you to move it. Your task was to push. And now you think that you have failed. But is that really so? Look at yourself.”

“Your arms are strong and muscled, your back sinewy and brown, your hands are hardened from constant pressure, and your legs have become massive and hard. Through opposition you have become stronger, and your abilities now surpass what you used to have. You haven’t moved the rock. But your call was to be obedient and to push and to exercise your faith and trust in my wisdom. These are the blessings I have planned to give you through obedience.”

Today, the Lord may challenge you to do something you do not understand. The Lord may command you to go to a certain place you do not want to go. The Lord may tell you to do something you think is useless. The Lord may say to you to do something you cannot find any reason to do. While you obey his words, you may feel that your obedience does not make any difference. But the Lord works for you through your obedience. Through your obedience the Lord bless you beyond your understanding.

Acknowledge who you are in God’s holy presence

Right after the miraculous catch of fish, Simon looked up at Jesus. At that moment, Simon was able to see God's holy presence in Jesus. In front of God's holy presence, he could see his sinfulness. He confessed, "*Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man.*" (Verse 8)

The purpose of the Lord when he helped Simon catch lots of fish was not the fish. It was to help Simon see the Holy God in Jesus. It was to help him realize who he really was in God's holy presence.

To improve and transform our lives to a better and higher level, we must first find out who we really are. Because only then can we tackle the right issues, the core issues within us which must be improved or changed.

But as we have experienced, it is not easy for us to find out who we really are. How many times have we seen some people around us who never realize who they really are, and what is the key point to changing their lives? It is not easy for us to tell other people who we think they really are, especially when we must tell them about their shortfalls or weaknesses. Even if we tell them about their shortfalls or weaknesses with genuine love and concern for them, they either do not want to hear about it, or do not understand it.

It is not only other people who do not realize who they really are. It is you and me too. We do not want to hear negative comments of us from other people. We do not want to hear criticism from others, even if their criticism comes from their love for us. We become defensive and upset instead of taking their comment or advice for our own benefit.

But when we fail, especially fail miserably, we may realize how weak we are, and how fragile we are. What the Lord does through our failures is to help us find out who we really are. The Lord helps us to see His holy presence and see ourselves before His holy presence so that we can see who we really are. Only when we stand before God's holy presence,

can we see who we really are. And we confess, “I am a sinful man.” When we realize that we are sinners, we stop blaming our circumstances. We stop blaming people around us. We stop blaming our government, schools, or teachers. We stop blaming our family members.

We are ready to admit our own shortfalls and weaknesses. We are ready to acknowledge that it is ourselves who are responsible.

When there is the confession, “I am a sinful man” God can start transforming our lives.

When Simon confessed, “I am a sinful man,” Jesus said to him “*Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.*” (Verse 10). What Jesus means by these words is that He would turn Simon from a mere fisherman to a great spiritual leader who would lead many souls to God’s salvation and blessings.

Simon was concerned about the fishing business only for himself and his family. However, Jesus transformed his life to a great teacher and minister who would bring the blessings of the gospel to countless people.

As the Lord used Simon’s failure to let him hear God’s higher calling, He uses our failures to let us hear God’s higher calling.

Today, our main concern may be physical food. But Jesus is concerned about food for our hungry soul. We are concerned about bills to pay; Jesus is concerned about the eternal bill that we must pay because of sin. We are concerned about clothes to wear; Jesus is concerned about the clothing of righteousness to cover our spiritual nakedness. We are concerned about things; Jesus is concerned about people. We are concerned about our own business; Jesus is concerned about the greater business of saving people all over the world.

That is what happened to Moses' life when he was a poor shepherd failure. That is what happened to Paul when he was a persecutor against the church. That is what happened to countless believers who failed.

The world accepts you only when you can succeed, only when you have the ability to perform well. However, the Lord accepts you even when you are unable to succeed, even when you fail. So, when you fail and get depressed, come to God's holy presence, and seek God's higher calling for you. He will enable you to overcome all your failures and to accomplish great things.