

CHAPTER TEN

TRIED AND FAILED?

OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this chapter you will be able to:

- Write the Key Verse from memory.
- Identify Biblical examples of men who overcame failure to return to the perfect will of God.
- Identify Biblical examples of men who missed the will of God and their lives ended in failure.
- List guidelines for getting back into God's will when you fail.

KEY VERSE:

Oh, that my people had hearkened unto me and Israel had walked in my ways. (Psalms 81:13)

INTRODUCTION

In this course you learned many ways God speaks to man to communicate His will. But what happens when you fail to discern the will of God? Perhaps you deliberately disobey His voice. Perhaps you miss His direction through error or misunderstanding of Biblical principles. Maybe you act too quickly without His guidance. What should you do when you have tried and failed?

FAILURES WHO WERE SUCCESSES

The Bible contains many examples of great leaders who at some point in their lives failed to listen to the voice of God and missed His will. Yet, these men who failed became great successes:

Abraham: He lied about Sarah being his wife for fear he would be killed and his wife taken from him. Yet he is called a man of faith and the friend of God.

Moses: He struck the rock and called forth water instead of speaking to it as God directed. Yet the Bible states there has never been another prophet as great as Moses.

David: He committed adultery with another man's wife, then had the man killed to try to cover his sin. Yet he was a great king and is called a man after God's own heart.

Jonah: This preacher went the opposite direction when God called him to preach in Ninevah. Later he preached the greatest revival in history. The whole city repented.

Peter: He denied Jesus, but later became a great leader in the early church.

FAILURES WHO WERE FAILURES

The Bible also contains many examples of men who missed the will of God and their lives ended in failure and defeat:

Samson: He was an important judge in the nation of Israel and had great physical strength given him from God. He began to deliver Israel from the Philistine enemy. But through involvement with a heathen woman, Samson was taken captive and died while yet a prisoner of the enemy.

Uziah: This king originally did what was right in the sight of the Lord and God made him prosper. But Uziah sinned by entering the temple and performing duties which only the priests were permitted to do. He was stricken with leprosy and died.

Saul: The first king of Israel, Saul was a man adored by the people and upon whom the Spirit of God rested. Because of disobedience, Saul was rejected by God and another king was selected to complete his task. Saul's life ended in failure, disgrace, and suicide.

Eli: Originally a great priest in the house of the Lord, Eli and his sons died in disgrace because of disobedience.

Judas: Judas was a disciple of Jesus during His earthly ministry. He witnessed the great miracles of Jesus and heard His teachings. Yet he betrayed Jesus and ended his own life by suicide.

WHAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE?

We have listed several Biblical examples of men who at some point in their lives failed to discern God's will. Some of these men recovered from failure and went on to be great men of God. Others never reversed their direction. Their lives ended in failure. What made the difference?

To answer this question, let us examine in more detail the lives of two kings of Israel, David and Saul. First, read the story of David's departure from God's will in II Samuel chapters 11-12. Then read the story of Saul's failure in I Samuel chapter 15. David's failure appears so much greater than that of Saul. Saul simply brought back some oxen as spoil from battle when God had told him not to do so.

David committed adultery with another man's wife. When she became pregnant he had her husband killed to try to cover the sin. Saul was rejected by God as king, yet David remained on

the throne and was called a man after God's own heart. Why did one man's life end in failure while the other went on to future successes?

When the prophet Samuel confronted Saul with his sin, Saul said. . .

. . .I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.

Then he said, I have sinned; yet honor me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I worship the Lord thy God. (I Samuel 15:24 and 30)

Saul was caught in his sin and he admitted it. He was sorry, but only for being caught. Being sorry for sin is not enough. Sorrow must lead to repentance:

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. (II Corinthians 7:10)

Saul admitted he failed, but he blamed his failure on other people. He wanted Samuel to honor him before the leaders so he would not be disgraced. He wanted Samuel to worship God with him to show people he was still a spiritual man.

Saul never confessed his sin to God, repented, and asked forgiveness. He refused to accept personal responsibility for his actions. He offered God worship when God wanted repentance. Saul was more concerned about his reputation among the people than his relationship to God. Because of this, Samuel told Saul:

. . .The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou. (I Samuel 15:28)

The kingdom was taken from Saul and given to David.

When the prophet Nathan confronted David about his sin, David immediately acknowledged:

I have sinned against the Lord. (II Samuel 12:13)

He did not try to blame others. He did not blame Bathsheba. He admitted his failure and humbly repented before God.

David's great prayer of repentance is recorded in Psalms 51. Read this entire Psalm in your Bible. David acknowledged his sin and asked forgiveness:

For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight. . .

**Create in me a clean heart O God; and renew a right spirit within me.
(Portions of Psalms 51**

Both Saul and David made wrong choices. When confronted with his error, David repented and changed direction. Saul did not. He strayed farther from the will of God and his life ended in failure, defeat, and suicide.

TRIED AND FAILED?

When you have missed the will of God, there are Biblical guidelines which will enable you to return to the will of the Lord. To illustrate these guidelines we will use the example of Jonah. Read the book of Jonah in your Bible before proceeding with this lesson.

Jonah was commanded by the Lord to go and preach repentance to the sinful nation of Ninevah. Instead of obeying God, he headed the opposite direction. Jonah took the following steps to return to the will of God. These are steps to take when you experience failure:

REALIZE YOUR FAILURE:

It took a great storm at sea to convince Jonah he was out of the will of God. (Jonah 1:2) Be assured: God has ways of letting you know when you have missed His will!

As long as you fail to realize you have missed the will of God, you can never get back into His will. Do not let any excuse prevent you from admitting failure. Here are some common ones:

"People will lose confidence in me."

"If I admit failure it is admitting I was wrong."

"I already failed. I might as well give up."

"It is too late."

"I am a bad example, so I should just quit."

"I am too far out of the will of God to ever get things right."

"I don't know if I can even find the will of God again."

REPENT OF YOUR SIN:

Jonah's great prayer of repentance is recorded in Jonah chapter 2. Jonah acknowledged his sin before God, repented, and asked forgiveness. When you miss the will of God, come before the Lord in repentance and ask God to forgive you. Be sure to forgive yourself, too! It is not necessary to repent publicly unless it has affected the lives of others and you need to ask their forgiveness. It is necessary to repent before God.

RECOGNIZE THE DEPARTURE POINT:

Through prayer, the written Word of God, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, determine the point at which you missed God's will. In the case of Jonah, he recognized his departure from the will of God began when he went the opposite direction from Ninevah.

RETURN TO CORRECT THE ERROR:

Return to the point of departure and correct the error, if possible. When Jonah recognized his failure began by heading the opposite direction from Ninevah, he reversed directions. He went to Ninevah. He corrected his error (Jonah 3:3).

Sometimes you can do nothing to correct an error except repent. In the example of David which we discussed, he could do nothing about his sin with Bathsheba after it was committed. The mistake was already made. There was nothing he could do to correct it except repent. In situations where you can take corrective action, however, it should be done.

REVELATION. . .SEEK GOD FOR AND ACT UPON NEW DIRECTION:

After you admit your failure, ask forgiveness, determine the point of departure, and correct any errors possible, seek the Lord for new direction. Remove any hindrances to hearing the voice of God. These might include sins of rebellion, self-will, and wrong attitudes. Continue to train your spiritual ear to hear God's voice by praying and studying His written Word.

As Jonah sought God for new direction, the Lord spoke unto him a second time and said, "Arise, and go to Ninevah" (Jonah 3:1-2). This time, Jonah obeyed the voice of the Lord. He went to Ninevah and preached the message of God. He experienced the greatest revival in history. The whole city repented (Jonah chapter 3).

The Bible contains many stories of men like Jonah. These men failed but admitted their failure and asked forgiveness. When they did, God always forgave them and provided new direction. He will do the same for you! God is not looking at your past record. He is not looking at you as you are. He is seeing the man or woman you can be if you walk in obedience to the voice of God.

SUMMARY

The following chart summarizes Biblical guidelines to follow when you miss the will of God:

WHEN YOU MISS GOD'S WILL

Recognize Your Failure

Repent Of Your Sin

Recognize The Departure Point

Return To Correct The Error

Revelation: Seek God For And Act Upon New Direction

SELF-TEST

1. Write the Key Verse from memory.

2. Identify three Biblical examples great men who triumphed over their failures and returned to the perfect will of God.

3. Identify three Biblical examples of men who missed the will of God and whose lives ended in failure:

4. List five guidelines for getting back into God's will when you have failed:

(Answers to tests are provided at the conclusion of the final chapter in this manual.)

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. In Luke 15:11-32 Jesus told the story of a young man who left his father and went to live in a strange country. Study this story carefully, especially the portion which tells of the son's return to the house of his father. You will discover he followed the guidelines for correcting failure which were discussed in this chapter.
2. Study the following examples of men who at some point in their lives missed the will of God. Which ones corrected their failures? How did they turn their failures into success? Which ones did not correct their failures? What was the result?

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|------------|--|
| Abraham: | Genesis 20-21 |
| Moses: | Exodus; see also Acts 7:20-44 |
| Balaam: | Numbers 22 |
| Uziah: | II Chronicles 26 |
| Samson: | Judges 13-16 |
| David: | II Samuel 11-12; Psalms 51. |
| Saul: | I Samuel 8-15 |
| Jonah: | The book of Jonah |
| Peter: | Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts |
| John Mark: | Acts 12:12, 25; 15:39; II Timothy 4:11 |

You can add other examples to this list from your own study of God's Word.

3. Jesus told two important parables about the will of God. Study Luke 12:42-48 and Matthew 21:28-32 and summarize what you learn.
