

OVERCOMING FAILURE

book forty-seven in the series:

THE OWNER'S MANUAL TO THE NEW YOU

DOUG BRITTON, MFT

Five-day Bible study for individuals, small groups, and churches

Day One: David's Example

Day Two: Paul's Example

Day Three: Peter's Example

Day Four: Learn from Your Failures

Day Five: Review and Test

Overcoming Failure: Book forty-seven in “The Owner’s Manual to the New You”

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The Owner's Manual to the New You

Forty-eight short books

(Each book includes a five-day Bible study and homework)

By Doug Britton, MFT

Twelve books on “Knowing God”

Twelve books on “Developing a Godly Character”

Twelve books on “Enjoying Healthy Relationships”

Twelve books on “Overcoming Personal Problems”

For

Individuals

Small Groups

Churches

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The Owner's Manual to the New You

"The Owner's Manual to the New You," published by LifeTree Books, is a series of forty-eight cross-cultural discipleship books by Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist Doug Britton. LifeTree Books is making these books available free of charge for individual use.

Each book is ideal for a five-day study by small groups, classes, or individuals. Although this is a forty-eight-book series, each book can be studied as a complete book by itself.

Knowing God

- Book 1: Who is God?
- Book 2: Becoming a Believer
- Book 3: Your Identity in Christ
- Book 4: Quick Overview of the Bible
- Book 5: How to Study the Bible
- Book 6: How to Pray
- Book 7: Key Christian Practices
- Book 8: Successful Christian Living
- Book 9: Living a Joyful Life
- Book 10: Knowing God's Will
- Book 11: Obeying God
- Book 12: Living in God's Power

Developing a Godly Character

- Book 13: Growing in Christ
- Book 14: Changing Your Self-Image
- Book 15: Changing Your Attitudes
- Book 16: Living with Humility
- Book 17: Living with Purpose
- Book 18: Living with Self-Control
- Book 19: Living with Integrity
- Book 20: Growing through Problems
- Book 21: Trusting God
- Book 22: Breaking Free from Our Culture
- Book 23: Handling Money Responsibly
- Book 24: Staying Faithful to God

Enjoying Healthy Relationships

- Book 25: Keys to Healthy Relationships
- Book 26: Making Friends
- Book 27: Showing Grace to Others
- Book 28: Forgiving Others
- Book 29: Serving Others
- Book 30: Resolving Conflicts
- Book 31: Overcoming Peer Pressure
- Book 32: Helping Others with Wisdom
- Book 33: Dating, Marriage, and Sex
- Book 34: Embracing the Body of Christ
- Book 35: Respecting Authority
- Book 36: Sharing Your Faith

Overcoming Personal Problems

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- Book 38: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)
- Book 39: Overcoming Rejection
- Book 40: Overcoming Temptation (Part 1)
- Book 41: Overcoming Temptation (Part 2)
- Book 42: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear
- Book 43: Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
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Foreword

When I was first asked to write a series of downloadable books for intensive discipleship training, I was excited. Jesus has revolutionized my life, and I am glad to share his truths with you.

The pages you are about to study come straight from God's word. They contain truth that puts our feet on the path to the fullest life possible—truth that sets us free.

As Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

May God speak to your heart as you read, and may he bring his truth alive in your life.

Your brother in Christ,

Doug Britton

P.S. LifeTree Books is offering this downloadable book and all the other books in "The Owner's Manual to the New You" series free of charge. If you find these books helpful, please feel free to spread the news to churches, ministries, and individuals who might benefit from them.

Small Group Leader's Guidelines

Introduction. These studies are for new believers as well as mature Christians. They are for small groups, discipleship classes, mentors, and individuals. They are ideal for studies lasting from sixty to ninety minutes.

Choose the key points, verses, and discussion questions you will talk about. Don't think you need to cover every verse and question. With new believers, go over the main points, key verses, and selected questions. Go into more depth with mature Christians.

Begin and end each study with prayer. Start by asking God to help each person grow from the study. At the end, ask everyone to pray for help to put God's truth into practice.

Review homework. Before starting the current lesson, ask group members to discuss their answers to some of the previous day's homework questions.

Personalize the lesson. Although it's okay to read each lesson word-for-word, the material will "come alive" if you discuss some of the key points in your own words. Share your own experiences and struggles, and how God has helped you.

As you read, identify important points and key parts of verses. Ask group members to circle them, and then explain why you want to emphasize these points.

Get everyone involved. The more people are actively involved, the more they are impacted by what you are studying. Don't ask questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." For example, don't ask, "Do you have any thoughts about this?" Instead, ask, "How does this insight speak to you?"

Consider breaking up into smaller groups to discuss the questions if you are leading a large group or class.

Use day five for a review and test. Use the questions in day five as a review and/or test. Remove these pages if you do not want group members to see the questions ahead of time.

Want to Learn More?

Free online resources: For more suggestions for small group leaders as well as many online Bible studies on Christianity and daily living (anger, marriage, self-image, finances, and more), visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups

Small group leader's book: For detailed information on how to lead small groups and overcome typical problems, visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups.

Day One: David's Example

In this book, you will read about something most of us don't like to think about—failure. More importantly, you will read about three men in the Bible who learned from their failures, and who later were used by God to accomplish amazing things. I pray that their stories will encourage you.

We all fail sometimes

No one can live for very long without failing. Sometimes our failures are relatively minor, sometimes they are serious. But we can be sure that we will fail, many times. The important question is, how will we respond to our failures?



David's example

David, King of Israel, failed in major ways. Let's review his story:

David sinned.

One evening, while his army was away fighting a war, David was walking on the roof of his palace when he saw a beautiful woman bathing, apparently on a neighboring roof. Although he knew Bathsheba was married, he also knew that her husband Uriah was off fighting in the war, so David had her come to the palace and he had sex with her. Later Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant. She sent word to David. (Read 2 Samuel 11:2-5.)

Discussion questions

1. David committed two sins in this passage. What were they?
2. What do you think God thought about David's actions? Explain your answer.

David tried to hide his sin by being sneaky.

David didn't want anyone to know he had gotten Bathsheba pregnant. He gave orders for Uriah to be brought back to Jerusalem. David hoped Uriah would have sex with Bathsheba, and when the child was born, Uriah would assume it was his own. Uriah, however, chose not to have sex with her, because he thought it would be wrong to make love while his fellow soldiers were fighting.

David didn't give up on his plan. He invited Uriah to dinner and got him drunk, hoping Uriah then would go home and have sex with his wife. Once again, Uriah chose not to have sex with Bathsheba. (Read 2 Samuel 11:6-13.)

Discussion questions

3. Was David's plan to get Uriah drunk and then have sex with his wife a good idea? Why or why not?

4. After David learned Bathsheba was pregnant, what should he have done?

David tried to hide his sin by killing Uriah.

When his plans didn't work out, David arranged for Uriah to get killed in battle when Uriah went back to the war. Some other soldiers were killed at the same time. (Read 2 Samuel 11:14-25.)

Discussion questions

5. David's strategy seemed to work, since Uriah wouldn't be able to confront him. Do you think God was impressed by David's clever plan? Why or why not?
6. Have you ever failed in a major way and then tried to cover it up? If so, what do you think God would have wanted you to do?

After Bathsheba's time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife. She gave birth to a son. But David's actions displeased the Lord. (Read 2 Samuel 11:26-27.)

The prophet Nathan confronted David, and David confessed.

God had the prophet Nathan confront David about his sin. It took David a few minutes to understand what Nathan was saying, but when he understood, he replied, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan responded by saying that God "took away" the sin. (Read 2 Samuel 12:1-13.)

Discussion question

7. Did David respond to the confrontation properly? Why or why not?

Read more of 2 Samuel, and you will see that David's sins resulted in serious consequences. The son conceived in adultery died. But as you continue reading, you will learn that Bathsheba and David had another son, Solomon (2 Samuel 12:24). Solomon became a great king in Israel.

God brought unexpected (good) consequences.

Although David and Bathsheba started their marriage in such a sinful way, God brought good out of their failures.

- David wrote inspiring Psalms that tell of God's character, love, and forgiveness.
- Many centuries later Joseph, a direct descendent of David and Solomon, became the "father" of Jesus.

Discussion questions

8. Why do you think God had Jesus born in a direct lineage from David and Bathsheba since their marriage was based on deceit, sexual sin, and murder? Does that mean God approved of what they did? Explain your answer.
9. Think about your failures. Does the story of David and Bathsheba give you hope for your future? Why or why not?

Another result of David's sins was the moving Psalms he wrote about his actions and God's forgiveness. For example, he wrote Psalm 51:

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your

unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise

In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar. (Psalm 51:1-19)

Discussion question

10. Read one or two sentences from Psalm 51 that stand out to you. Explain why you chose these sentences.

Lessons we can learn from David

- It's better to fight temptation in your mind than it is to give in to temptation and then deal with the consequences.
- When you sin, deal with it. Don't try to cover it.
- When you sin, don't commit more sins to cover it up.
- It's never too late to confess.
- When you confess, God will forgive you.
- After you confess, deal with the consequences.

Discussion question

11. Describe how one or more of these lessons we can learn from David encourages you.

Do you know Jesus?

This book was written to help believers in Jesus grow in their faith and personal life. You will get the most out of these pages if you know Christ, since it is through his love and power that you can truly change. If you have not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, let me invite you to accept him as your Savior and Lord. Make this your personal prayer:

Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and I need your help. I confess I have sinned and failed you in many ways. I invite you to be my Savior and Lord, and I ask you to help me follow you the rest of my life. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and accepting me as your child.

If you prayed this prayer, welcome to the family of God. God has plans for you—to transform you. You have an exciting life ahead of you!

Memory verse

Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. (Psalm 51:2)

Homework – Day One

1. What was David's first mistake (or sin) in this story? Explain your answer:
2. What were some sneaky ways David tried to deal with Bathsheba being pregnant?
3. Have you ever tried using sneaky techniques to get out of something wrong that you did? If so, briefly explain what you did:
4. David didn't confess his sin right away, but he finally did. Do you think his confession was genuine? Why or why not?

5. How easy is it for you to genuinely confess when you commit a sin? Explain your answer:

6. Write a prayer asking God to help you honestly confess any sins you commit in the future:

7. How did God bring good things out of David's sins?

8. What are some good things God could bring out of your past sins?

Day Two: Paul's Example

I'm glad the Bible describes the failures of many people who committed serious sins or failed in other ways. If the Bible only had stories of successful, perfect people, I would have trouble relating to it.

Discussion question

1. Are you encouraged to know that you aren't alone in having failed sometimes? Explain your answer.

Paul's example

After Jesus rose from the grave and was resurrected, his followers were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to share the good news about Jesus, and many people became believers.

The Jewish leaders were extremely upset about this. They thought they had dealt with Jesus by having him crucified. A young man named Saul was especially upset. (Note: In Acts 13:9, we read that Saul "was also called Paul." From that point on, the Bible refers to him as Paul.)

Paul was an accomplice to murder.

The first time we read about Paul, he was an accomplice to murder. He was guarding the clothes of a mob that was stoning Stephen to death. Stephen's "crime" was preaching about Jesus.

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:57-60)

We read that Paul was there, giving approval of Stephen's death (Acts 8:1).

Discussion question

2. Do you think Saul was impressed by Stephen's short prayer? Why or why not?

Paul captured Christians in Jerusalem and put them in jail.

Paul, previously known as Saul, continued to persecute Jesus' followers in Jerusalem, going house to house and dragging people off to prison.

And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. (Acts 8:1-4)



Paul traveled to other cities to persecute Christians, and he voted for many to be killed.

Not only did Paul persecute Christians in Jerusalem, he also traveled to foreign cities to persecute them (Acts 26:11). He tried to get them to blaspheme, and he voted for many to be put to death.

I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them. (Acts 26:9-11)

Paul planned a trip to look for Christians in Damascus. Before he left, he asked the high priest for letters of introduction to the synagogues in Damascus.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2)

Discussion questions

3. What does "Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples" mean?
4. If you were living when Paul was alive, would you think Paul was likely to become a believer, or that God might make him an apostle? Explain your answer.

Paul had an encounter with Jesus while on the way to Damascus.

While Paul was on the road to Damascus, he had an amazing encounter with Jesus and became a believer. (Read Acts 9:3-19.)

Discussion question

5. What was your "Damascus road" experience? (When did you become a believer?)

Paul intensely dedicated himself to serving God.

Paul's life changed dramatically. The man who had severely persecuted followers of Jesus immediately began to preach about Jesus.

At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. (Acts 9:20)

Paul's life turned around completely. Instead of persecuting Christians, he started to tell people about Jesus, and he started churches over much of the Roman empire. He was often beaten and imprisoned for his faith. He wrote:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)

Discussion question

6. What did Paul mean when he wrote, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21)?

Paul became humble.

Paul was a Jewish leader before becoming a Christian. However, after he was born again, he was deeply regretful and humbled by his sins. He referred to himself as the worst of all sinners (1

Timothy 1:15). Also, although he recognized that he was an apostle, he described himself as “the least of the apostles.”

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. (1 Corinthians 15:9-10)

Paul did not think God saved him because he was a good person. Paul realized that the opposite was true. God saved him as an example of his unlimited patience for those who believe in Christ.

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:16)

Discussion questions

7. Is it easy for an important person to be humble? Why or why not?
8. Does being humble mean you can't lead? Why or why not?

God brought unexpected (good) consequences.

Although Paul had been an active enemy of Christ and approved of killing Christians, God forgave him and used him to make a tremendous difference for the cause of Christ.

- God used Paul to bring many people to faith in Christ, to establish churches, and to strengthen the body of Christ.
- God used Paul to write many letters that became part of the New Testament.

Discussion question

9. Think about your own failures. Does Paul's story give you hope for your future? Why or why not?

Lessons we can learn from Paul

- Don't give up because of your failures.
- Learn from your failures, then dedicate your life to serving Jesus.
- Be humbled by your failures. Thank God for his forgiveness. Never consider yourself a “big shot,” regardless of your position.
- Never give up on anybody. If Paul could be saved, anybody could be saved.

Discussion question

10. Describe how one or more of these “lessons we can learn from Paul” encourages you.

Memory verse

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:16)

Day Three: Peter's Example

In Days 1 and 2, you read about David and Paul, men who were guilty of murder and other serious crimes. Today you will read about another man, someone who didn't commit murder, but who failed in other ways.

Peter's example

Peter, one of Jesus' original disciples, was a key leader in the early church, yet he was far from perfect. In fact, he failed in several ways, even after he became a believer.

Peter rebuked Jesus.

Jesus told his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things, be killed, and then be raised to life on the third day. Peter didn't like the sound of that, so he took Jesus aside and rebuked him, saying, "Never, Lord" (Matthew 16:22).

Jesus responded to Peter by saying, "Get behind me, Satan" (Matthew 16:23).

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." (Matthew 16:21-23)

Discussion questions

1. Why did Jesus say, "Get behind me, Satan" (Matthew 16:23)?
2. Do you ever reject something in God's Word (the Bible)? If so, are you willing to ask God to help you understand and trust his Word? Why or why not?

Peter said he would not deny Jesus, but Jesus knew Peter was wrong.

The night Jesus was about to be betrayed, he told his disciples that they would all fall away on account of him. Peter said that even if all the other disciples fell away, he never would. Jesus, however, knew this was an empty boast.

Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."



But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same. (Matthew 26:31-35)

Discussion questions

3. When Peter said he would never disown Jesus, do you think he meant it? Why or why not?
4. Do you sometimes say you would do something—or you would never do something—too casually?

Peter fell asleep three times when Jesus asked him to keep watch.

Jesus told Peter and two other disciples, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Jesus left to pray privately, then returned to see Peter and the others sleeping. He said, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Matthew 26:41). Then he asked them to watch and pray, and he left a second time to pray. When he returned, they were again sleeping. He again asked them to keep watch and left a third time. Once again, they were sleeping when he returned. (Read Matthew 26:36-46.)

Discussion questions

5. Why do you think Peter didn't do what Jesus told him to do?
6. Do you sometimes do the opposite of what God tells you?

When Peter was asked if he was Jesus' follower, he said "no" three times.

Later the same evening, Jesus was arrested and brought before the Jewish leaders. Peter stood outside while Jesus was being questioned. Three different times people asked if he was with Jesus. Each time, Peter denied that he knew Jesus.

Immediately after Peter's third denial, a rooster crowed, fulfilling Jesus' prophecy. (Read Matthew 26:69-75.)

Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:75)

Peter repented as he wept bitterly.

After Jesus was crucified and resurrected, he asked Peter three times if he loved him. Peter said "yes" each time. Jesus then said, "Feed my sheep." He also told Peter how Peter would die and said, "Follow me." (Read John 21:1-19.)

Discussion question

7. Why do you think Peter disowned Jesus?

When God told Peter what to do in a vision, Peter said "no."

One day Peter went up on a roof to pray. He fell into a trance and was surprised to hear a voice give him instructions to kill and eat "unclean" food which would violate God's Old Testament laws. He knew it was God's voice, but he was shocked at what God said and he said "no."

Although Peter's first reaction was to say "no," he tried to figure out what it meant. A short time later, he understood God's message, and he obeyed it. (Read Acts 10:9-35.)

Discussion questions

8. Why do you think Peter said “no” so quickly, even though he knew it was God who was speaking?
9. Have you ever said “no,” to God, then changed your mind and said “yes”? Explain your answer.

Peter gave in to peer pressure and was a hypocrite.

Peter had been doing the right thing—eating with the Gentiles. However, when some fellow Jewish believers visited, he was afraid they might be upset, so he pulled away from the Gentiles. In other words, he gave in to peer pressure and became a hypocrite. (Paul later confronted Peter about his actions.)

Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. (Galatians 2:12-13)

Discussion question

10. How did Peter's hypocrisy affect those around him?

Lessons we can learn from Peter

- Everyone fails sometimes—even key Christian leaders.
- God understands that everyone fails sometimes.
- God corrects us when we fail.
- God expects us to learn from our failures.

Discussion question

11. Describe how one or more of these “lessons we can learn from Peter” encourages you.

Memory verse

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

Notes

Day Four: Learn from Your Failures

The failures you have been reading about were failures that involved sin—sometimes serious sin. Today we'll look at a different type of failure, ones that don't necessarily involve sin.

I'm thinking about failures such as getting laid off your job, failing a test, losing a friend, turning in your income tax too late, buying something that breaks down, making a bad investment, or losing a game of basketball.

Remember that God loves you

Don't let your sense of self-worth be determined by your failures (or your successes). The fact that God loves you is what really counts.

A good way to enjoy God's love is to think about, or meditate, on key verses from the Bible. Choose one of the following verses—or any other verse in the Bible about God's love—and write it in your smartphone or on a piece of paper and carry it with you. Read it from time to time, each time asking God to help you more fully understand his love for you.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:4-5)

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10)

Discussion questions

1. Can remembering God's love help you when you have failed at something? Why or why not?
2. How can you remind yourself that God loves you?

Examine your priorities

It's easy to get so caught up in an activity—school, your job, playing on a sports team, playing games on your smartphone—that you lose sight of what's really important. I love the way Jesus reminded his followers of what matters:



But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33)

Paul took Jesus' words to heart when he wrote:

I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ. (Philippians 3:8)

Remember the greatest commandment.

One day a religious leader asked Jesus to tell him which was the greatest commandment in the Law (Matthew 22:36).

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40)

Keep an eternal perspective.

When you set your heart on things above, your priorities change. Things that seemed really important become secondary. Even if you never get the promotion you want, or your sports team loses, you are at peace.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

If you "fail" in everything else but you love God, love others, and keep an eternal perspective, you are doing great in the things that matter.

Discussion questions

3. How have you been doing at loving God and loving others? Explain your answer.
4. How can keeping an eternal perspective help you deal with failure?

Get your satisfaction from your effort

When I play tennis, I am competitive. I throw myself into the game, and I enjoy winning. However, when I lose I am not crushed. I don't walk off the court muttering to myself or slamming my racquet on the ground. Instead, I (usually) walk off happy, knowing I threw myself into the game. In other words, I get my satisfaction from my effort, not the results.

Think about soccer for a minute. There are hundreds of millions of soccer players in the world, and millions of soccer teams. Each team might dream of winning the World Cup, but only one team can win it each year. That means all the others teams—no matter how much they practice or how hard they try—will "fail" to win the World Cup.

Should all the players on all the "failing" teams in the world feel like failures? I hope they don't, for there would be a lot of very depressed people in the world.

The Bible says to do everything with all your heart, as working for God. Give it your best shot, and you will have pleased God. He won't be upset if you aren't successful in the world. Try your best, but remember that God is mainly interested in how well you are loving him and loving others.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Colossians 3:23-24)

Discussion questions

5. Should every soccer player in the world feel awful because his or her soccer team didn't win the World Cup? Why or why not?
6. If you are a pastor and other pastors seem to give better sermons, even when you try to improve, should you give up being a pastor? Why or why not?
7. Can you see an area in your life where it would be helpful to get your satisfaction from your effort, not the result? Explain your answer.

Learn from your experiences

Remembering that God loves you, examining your priorities, and getting your satisfaction from your effort doesn't mean you shouldn't learn from your experiences and try to do better. Take some time to evaluate your experiences. Ask God to help you learn. Ask trusted friends for their feedback.

An upright man gives thought to his ways. (Proverbs 21:29)

By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures. (Proverbs 24:3-4)

As you seek to learn from your experiences, ask yourself questions such as:

- Did I think things through?
- Did I get advice from people I trust?
- Did I have realistic goals or was I too hopeful?
- Did I pray enough?
- Did I make a plan?
- Did I work at it hard enough?
- Did I work at it too hard and neglect what really matters?
- Should I try something different?

Discussion question

8. Think about a fairly recent failure. Which of the previous questions could help you learn something useful? How would it help?

Get give up

Don't give up even if you fail many times. Don't let the fear of failure hold you back. Many successful people had major failures before they found success. Learn from your experiences, but then get on your feet. Make a new plan and ask God to help you move forward.

Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity. (Proverbs 24:16)

Discussion questions

9. What does it mean to “rise again” (Proverbs 24:16)?
10. Are you dealing with the results of a failure? If so, what should you do to “rise again”?

Memory verse

I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ. (Philippians 3:8)

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5. If a basketball team does not make the playoffs, should all the players give up basketball? Why or why not?

6. Briefly describe one failure that you would like to examine using the bulleted questions under "Learn from your experiences":

7. Now choose three of the bulleted questions and describe how they will help you:

(a)

(b)

(c)

Day Five: Answer Key to Test (may be removed by leader)

Note to teachers and small group leaders

Remove this page if you do not want group members to see these answers ahead of time.

True or false

- F 1. David sinned, but it was an understandable sin, so God did not hold it against him.
- T 2. God brought some good out of David's sins.
- F 3. It wasn't so bad for David to have sex with Bathsheba since he married her.
- T 4. Paul voted for many Christians to be put to death.
- F 5. Paul helped many Christians break out of prison.
- T 6. Paul ended up writing many letters in the New Testament.
- T 7. Peter denied Jesus three times when Jesus was being questioned.
- F 8. Peter never gave in to peer pressure.
- F 9. If you can't be the best at something, don't do it.
- T 10. We can learn from our failures.

Memory verses

- 1. Philippians 3:8

I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

- 2. Psalm 51:2

Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.



About the Author

Doug Britton, Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist, has helped hundreds of thousands of people as a therapist, clinical director of a treatment center, seminar speaker, radio co-host, and author of over twenty books that show people how to apply God's truths in their daily lives.

He has also trained pastors, counselors, mentors, and lay leaders in biblical counseling, mentoring, and small group leadership.

Doug and his wife Skeeter live in Northern California.



Books

Doug has written Bible-based books on many daily-living topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore.

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Read and download Doug's free online studies on marriage, parenting, anger, self-concept, anxiety, depression, temptation, fear of death, biblical counseling, mentoring, small group leadership, and other topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources.

Seminars and retreats

Doug is the founder and president of LifeTree Institute and LifeTree Books. If you would like him or another member of the LifeTree team to speak in your church on any of the above topics, please visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com and click on the "Seminars" link.

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Defeating Temptation
Healing Life’s Hurts
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